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Conflict and Change at the Margins: Emergency Kampong Clearance and the Making of Modern Singapore

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In July 1953, the Acting Lands Manager of the Singapore Improvement Trust (SIT), the de facto colonial housing authority in Singapore, led three Lands Inspectors, twelve labourers and two escorting police constables to a kampong (''village'') at Geylang Lorong 27 in the City. Their task – to demolish three unauthorised wooden houses built on Trust land, occupied by two families. But one of these families, a Chinese family, refused to leave. The demolition team was confronted by ''a hostile crowd of about forty people'', some of whom ''adopted a threatening attitude'' to the outsiders. The team withdrew to the main road and had a police patrol sent to the kampong:

> The officer in charge of the patrol car interrogated the obstructive family during which time a crowd of fifty persons or more gathered. In view of the hostile attitude adopted by certain members of the crowd he decided to ask for further support. By this time the whole area was aroused.

It required the presence of a riot squad before the Chinese family in question was removed and the wooden houses demolished.[1]

The Geylang Lorong 27 incident was one of numerous encounters between the state and the Chinese kampong population that lit up the margins of Singapore City after World War II. Official attempts to clear the urban kampongs were deeply contested and frequently resulted in social and political conflict. Such clearance constituted a strategic front in the efforts of Singapore's ruling elites to establish what James Scott termed a ''high modernist'' state, based on a robust ''self-confidence about scientific and technical progress'' and ''the rational design of social order commensurate with the scientific understanding of natural laws'' (Scott, 1998, p. 4). The existing scholarship on Singapore's postwar history has focused primarily

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on the politics of decolonisation, which has created a historiographical boundary between the late colonial period and the People's Action Party (PAP) era (Yeo, 1973; Drysdale, 1984; Turnbull, 1989; Yeo and Lau, 1991; Lau, 1998). This paper, however, suggests a new approach to understanding the postwar period by examining developments at the interface between social and political history.

Public housing, the quintessential architectural form of mid twentieth-century modernism, became the chief instrument of social change after the war. Both the British colonial regime and the PAP sought, over and above the politics of decolonisation, to transform the urban landscape by replacing kampongs and shophouses in the City with planned, self-contained public housing estates. The aim was not, as frequently avowed, merely to raise the people's living standards, but to mould the semi-autonomous residents into model citizens of the high modernist nation-state. Since the early 1970s, sociologists, political scientists and geographers have done good work in exploring the link between public housing and the political and economic development of Singapore (Gamer, 1972; Buchanan, 1972; Castells, Goh and Kwok, 1990; Tremewan, 1994; Chua, 1997; 2000). What the subject still lacks, however, is a historical treatment of the concurrent kampong clearance campaign and the social conflict that marked the making of modern Singapore (Loh, 2007a, p. 11). The archival research on which this paper is based expands on the case-based fieldwork by Robert Gamer and Iain Buchanan among kampong dwellers in the Kallang area in the mid-1960s. Gamer was also given some access to official files, which, unfortunately, were not cited in his book, but archival material on housing in the PAP period has since been, and remains, restricted (Tai, 1988; Loh, 2007b).

By examining the declassified Singapore Improvement Trust files in the National Archives of Singapore, this paper highlights two central themes in the history of housing development in the 1950s and 1960s. First, the official archives throw light on the different ways in which the residents contested kampong clearance. This provides an important insight into the changing character of postwar Chinese society, and in particular the low-income population's relationship with the state.

Second, the SIT files underline the continuity in the aims and methods of kampong clearance between the British colonial and PAP periods. Kampong clearance became closely intertwined with the political dynamics of decolonisation, in which the PAP's role changed over time. As an anti-colonial party seeking to build a mass movement against colonialism from the mid-1950s, the PAP collaborated with left-wing rural associations that organised kampong dwellers against clearance. However, upon coming to power in 1959, the group within the party headed by Lee Kuan Yew, who had become Prime Minister of the self-governing State of Singapore, inherited the colonial mantle and methods of kampong clearance and resettlement. Expanding the colonial public housing program on a massive scale, Lee's government methodically suppressed independent or hostile centres of political and social power in the early 1960s, including the rural associations and the urban kampongs. Abruptly and dramatically, the PAP's role changed from anti-colonial mobilisation to the integrative task of nation-building. This analysis of housing development produces a more nuanced understanding of the forces of change and continuity in postwar Singapore. The PAP embraced much

of the politics and poetics of social change previously utilised by the British, but was also far more determined to accomplish its objectives.

Singapore's experience suggests that we need to situate the diverse ways in which public housing projects elsewhere in Asia have been envisaged, implemented and resisted in their proper historical contexts. The association between kampong clearance and building a high modernist nation-state in Singapore can be usefully compared to that in postwar Hong Kong. Indeed, both countries have often been viewed as exceptional Asian success stories, where powerful states presiding over small territories carried out ambitious planned housing projects in determined pursuit of developmental goals (Laquian, 2005). As was the case in Singapore, Hong Kong's public housing program was both an engine of the British colony's economic expansion and an instrument of social control of its Chinese population (Castells, Goh and Kwok, 1990). Squatter clearance in Hong Kong in the 1950s was a deeply political campaign that sought to bestow citizenship rights, and obligations, upon the "unreliable Chinese" of the city-state (Smart, 2006; 2008). Yet, even Hong Kong differs from Singapore in that its squatter settlements have survived into the present period, due in large part to inertia in the British colonial administration (Smart, 2001).

It is important, however, not to continue to treat Singapore and Hong Kong as Asian exceptions, but to view squatter clearance and public housing development in different parts of Asia after World War II as a shared historical experience. Again, historians, through either archival or oral history research, can contribute significantly to this endeavour. The existing work on squatter clearance in Asia is important in highlighting the difficulty of implementing involuntary resettlement, and its dire impact on evicted communities. Most efforts in China, South Korea, South Asia, and much of Southeast Asia have failed due to inadequate official planning or strong resistance from residents (Cernea and Guggenheim, 1993; Aldrich and Sandhu, 1995; Olds, Bunnell and Leckie, 2002; Ooi, 2005; Laquian, 2005). It is frequently claimed that Asia's governments were totally unprepared to deal with the massive housing crises they faced immediately after the war (Laquian, 2005, p. 353). Beyond such narratives of failure, however, this paper contends that squatter clearance should be viewed as a world-historical phenomenon that characterised the twentieth century, albeit in the different forms dictated by local circumstances (Clancey, 2004). It was an integral part of a broader political and societal transformation frequently attempted by high modernist governments, both colonial and postcolonial. At the end of the Pacific War, squatter clearance in Asia was also an attempt to mobilise the previously semi-autonomous populations of colonies and pseudo-colonies into becoming the citizenry of new or rejuvenated nation-states. Socialist regimes have been no less enthusiastic than others in clearing urban squatters in pursuit of developmental goals, as was the case with the local communist government in Calcutta in the 1990s (Roy, 2004). Recent scholarship has also highlighted how contemporary globalisation has differently affected urban squatter settlements in Latin America, the Middle East and South Asia (Roy and AlSayyad, 2004). This paper introduces an important historical dimension to these comparative studies. It examines a postwar case where a postcolonial government utilised its predecessor's philosophy, methods and experience of kampong clearance, successfully resettled a

marginally-dwelling population and, in the process, profoundly reconfigured state-society relations in Singapore.

Encroaching upon the Margin

To the British colonial regime, the fifty-odd kampongs that were expanding at the periphery of Singapore City after the war were "black areas", representing a dangerous, liminal "margin". This was the place where, as Mary Douglas and John Merriman observed, official control was weakest and frequently contested by subordinate groups, and where any drastic change could profoundly alter the basic character of society (Douglas, 2002, p. 150; Merriman, 1991, p. 6). The problem, in the British view, stemmed from the largely low-income Chinese nuclear or semi-extended families that resided in the urban kampongs, comprising a quarter of Singapore's urban population in 1961 (HDB, *Annual Report*, 1961, p. 4). This perception was based on Chinese families' physical mobility and elusiveness, their wariness of government, and their semi-autonomous ways of life.

Many of the Chinese urban kampong dwellers were relatively recent arrivals, either from the inner city or from China or Malaya. In a distinct break with the prewar period, Singapore's Chinese population was rapidly settling down and forming sizeable nuclear families after the war. This increase in family life resulted in a high rate of population growth of 4.5 per cent between 1947 and 1957. It also led to larger families leaving the congested shophouse cubicles in the Central Area, the traditional reception zone for Chinese immigrants, for larger wooden housing at the urban periphery. In 1956, the average size of households living in wooden dwellings was 4.8 persons, compared to 3.1 for households residing in shophouses (Goh, 1956, pp. 63–66). Many migrants were also arriving directly in the urban kampongs (van Grunsven, 1983b, p. 35, p. 95), where they could keep transport costs low by living close to their workplaces in the Central Area (van Grunsven, 1983a, p. 60). To meet this growing demand for cheap, suitably-located housing, private contractors built, often without official planning approval, large numbers of unauthorised wooden housing on vacant hills and disused cemeteries and over swamps on the urban fringe. The urban kampong population doubled from 127,000 in 1947 to 246,000 in the mid-1950s (Singapore, 1956, p. 13). This migration was thus a positive act by low-income Chinese families seeking a better future, particularly for their children. The congested "black areas" of the city were arguably "slums of hope".

The British authorities, however, worried about the difficulty of controlling the proliferation of unauthorised housing, where "[h]uts were erected with astonishing rapidity and ... it was difficult to get them demolished .... The situation changed almost from day to day and was very difficult to control" (SIT, 1927–47, p. 17). Added to their physical mobility was kampong dwellers' general wariness of officialdom. As Australian observers noted, the "traditional notion of 'law-abidingness'" among low-income Chinese in Malaya and Singapore did not amount to more than "keeping out of trouble and not interfering in matters not one's immediate concern".[2] Finally, the urban kampong population was occupationally fluid at a time when the authorities considered it imperative for Singapore to develop its manufacturing sector. Many urban kampong breadwinners engaged in irregular,

part-time or daily-rated employment in the informal economy, either as unlicensed hawkers, trishaw riders or "pirate" taxi-drivers (Singapore, 1955, p. 21; Brocklehurst, 1957, p. 47), or as casual labourers, who were "paid daily and move at frequent intervals from one job, and one employer, to another" (Singapore, 1957, p. 3). Such work was frequently supplemented by vegetable-growing or pig- and poultry-rearing outside one's wooden dwelling. This combination of irregular employment and semi-rural economic activity was sometimes plainly illegal. But it was also deeply frowned upon, for it meant that a large portion of the urban population was living beyond the social discipline imposed by full-time, regular work in the formal economy.

For the British government, the urban kampong world conflicted with its vision of a high modernist state. The 1947 Housing Committee likened the autonomous building development in postwar Singapore to a "disease" of "gigantism", in which a "chaotic and unwieldy megalopolis has been created ... by haphazard and unplanned growth". This uncontrolled housing development was perceived to be "detrimental to health and morals" and needing to be resolved through "demolition and re-housing" (Singapore, 1947, p. 11). The Committee's Chairman also viewed the kampongs as "the nurseries of a C3 nation and schools for training youth for crime". One could visit, he added, "if he likes to risk his personal safety, such unauthorised kampongs of attap huts".[3] The solution, then, was to replace the unauthorised wooden housing with planned, modern accommodation. The Housing Committee called for the SIT to be given "proper zoning powers and powers to plan ahead of development".[4]

The kampong clearance program was accompanied by a powerful official discourse, centring on the notion of an all-pervading sense of crisis, and calling for vigorous, large-scale government intervention (Clancey, 2004, p. 53). Terms such as "emergency", "clearance" and "rehousing", which sanctioned the destruction not merely of homes but of established ways of life, were vested with a potent moral and political authority in the official discourse. In addition to the wooden housing being depicted as congested, unsanitary and dangerous, urban kampong dwellers were labelled "squatters", thus depicting them discursively as socially inert and intrinsically incapable of establishing themselves in proper housing. This classification was inaccurate – the kampong dwellers were, really, "migrants" who, far from being inert, had left (or bypassed) the Central Area to find suitable housing at the margins of the City. The wooden house residents, too, were frequently not squatters but rent-paying "tenants", living on land that the government and private landowners had leased out for temporary use (Singapore, 1956, pp. 2–3).

Nonetheless, the British found the task of restoring the social margin through kampong clearance difficult to accomplish. The City's economic geography made many residents resistant to relocation. Full-time farmers found it difficult to obtain alternative agricultural land in the vicinity, as most suitable land in Singapore was already under cultivation (SIT, *Annual Report*, 1957, pp. 5–6). They also did not wish to convert to an urban lifestyle – two farming families, when evicted and offered accommodation by the SIT, demanded, "[H]ow can you expect us to give up our living system by altering the country life to city life? ... That is to say let the vegetables grow on rocks".[5] The bulk of the urban kampong population comprised

urban and "semi-urban" dwellers employed in the City. The authorities found at an early stage that these people could not "afford even the lowest type of Trust accommodation and that they will not move great distances from their work as the cost of transport is too great".[6] There was, the SIT realised,

> a fundamental objection amongst the local population, particularly the lower paid classes, to paying rent at all, and most of them would rather pay $5 a month for space in an overcrowded shophouse or an attap hut than pay a reasonable proportion, say up to 20% of their income, for good accommodation.[7]

Particularly difficult to rehouse were the semi-urban dwellers, for whom moving into a flat mandated not just a change of housing but a complete transformation of life:

> Most of these families are rural type dwellers, i.e. they have always lived in plank and attap houses, they have always depended on wells or standpipes for their supply of water, and they have never experienced water borne sewerage. On the other hand, they have always experienced a form of freedom which is absent in permanent thickly populated urban districts in that an increase in the family can be accommodated by extending the house, and when they are out of work, they can spend more time on the land and produce food. Their rent to the land owner is small and they have a feeling of independence and ownership.
>
> The threat of eviction to these people is a serious matter. If they move into rooms in a permanent house, they lose the produce of their gardens. If they erect their house elsewhere they must obtain permission of the landowner, the local authority and the Singapore Improvement Trust or else face a further eviction. Whatever move they make their former sense of security is destroyed.[8]

Pek Cheng Siew, for instance, was a trishaw rider, whose family of ten lived in an attap house at Geylang Lorong 41 that was built on Trust land.[9] When the SIT offered to relocate his family to a flat because the land had been earmarked for redevelopment, he protested:

> I am a poor man with a large family to support and am paying rent for land at $4 per month only ... With my meagre income, I could not afford to stay in SIT premises which is very expensive ... I have not applied for SIT premises nor have any intention of removing from my present abode.[10]

Nevertheless, the British government sought to relocate urban kampong dwellers such as Pek in planned settlements, where they "would become land owners and form a more stable community than tenants or shack-dwellers" (Singapore, 1956, pp. 2–12). This indicated the British desire to integrate semi-autonomous kampong dwellers into the formal structures of the state, which foreshadowed the PAP's housing policy.

Demolition and Spontaneous Resistance

Urban kampong clearance in the colonial period involved three government agencies. The first was the Municipal Commission (renamed the City Council in 1951), which was responsible for approving building plans, sanitising kampongs, fire-fighting, and providing modern social infrastructure in the urban area. The second agency was the SIT, which had mainly been concerned with improvement schemes in the Central Area before the war, but which had since been vested with the responsibility of building public housing on the margins of the City. Finally, there was the Land Office, which managed the use of vacant Crown lands through the issue of tenancy permits to wooden house owners for short-term periods of occupation. Similarly, the SIT issued Temporary Occupation Licences (TOLs) for the short-term use of Trust lands.

The Municipal Commission took the most basic approach to unauthorised wooden housing: demolition. However, its efforts were fundamentally piecemeal, tentative and self-defeating. The Commission attempted to establish control over unauthorised wooden housing built on Crown lands during the Japanese Occupation and the brief period of British military rule up to April 1946 by issuing 2-year tenancy permits (CC, *Minutes of Proceedings*, 12 January 1948). The purpose of the tenancies (and of the TOLs issued by the SIT) was purely regulatory, for they enabled a degree of official control over the housing which could then be cleared in the future.[11] However, the Commission considered new wooden houses built on Crown lands without official approval after April 1946 to be illegal, and treated occupants who refused to leave such accommodation as "trespassers".[12] In November 1951, an Attap Dwellings Special Committee formed by the City Council recommended that no new unauthorised wooden dwellings be permitted in the City, and that existing wooden housing be treated as "a necessary (but diminishing) evil while schemes for their replacement are progressing".[13] These proposals hardened the City Council's attitude towards newly-built unauthorised wooden housing, with the Council accepting that "[v]igorous action involving prosecution and demolition is the only way in which this open contempt of the City's building regulations can be tackled" (CC, *Administration Report*, 1952, p. 20). In July 1953, the Council began to demolish new unauthorised wooden dwellings, with its staff accompanied by police to prevent any breaches of the peace (CC, *Administration Report*, 1953, p. 18, p. 218). In six months, the Council proudly proclaimed, the average monthly number of new unauthorised houses was slashed from 100 to 15.

But demolition aroused great resentment and resistance. In mid-1952, one group of occupants was given only five minutes to remove their belongings before their wooden houses were demolished. Although they "begged the labourers who were pulling down our houses to allow us to retain the materials of the buildings", the latter simply "threw all our building materials into the river".[14] A serious difficulty also soon surfaced. The Council was forced to suspend demolitions in 1955 after the police withdrew protection for demolition squads without court orders for demolition (CC, *Administration Report*, 1955, p. 20). This was because, the police reasoned, their mere presence could provoke a breach of the peace.[15] But police support was restored in early 1956, following an assault by house owners on a demolition squad operating in Toa Payoh without an escort.[16]

The Toa Payoh incident and the need for police support highlighted the emergence of overt forms of resistance among the urban Chinese population (discussed further below). In the prewar period, this group had usually responded to unpopular municipal regulations with non-violent but effective forms of resistance such as non-compliance and evasion (Yeoh, 2003, p. 9). Such acts were what James Scott termed the "weapons of the weak" (Scott, 1985). But the older forms of social contestation still persisted among the Chinese after the war. The very act of building, and rebuilding, unauthorised wooden housing was a form of passive resistance. So was the mobility of the urban kampong population. The City Council found that many evicted occupants vacated their wooden dwelling without demolishing it, and new tenants simply moved in.[17]

In August 1955, growing resistance to eviction and demolition forced the City Council to designate areas in the City with wooden houses and the adjacent vacant lands as "attap areas", in effect authorising these lands for settlement (CC, *Minutes of Proceedings*, 31 August 1955). The Council attempted to impose some form of regulation. The "attap areas" were to be provided with "spine" roads for the passage of fire engines and refuse collection, while the wooden houses were mandated to be 25 feet apart and to be furnished with concrete floors and asbestos or corrugated iron roofs and kitchen walls (CC, *Minutes of Proceedings*, 1955, p. 1075). In truth, such regulations existed only on paper. In 1956, the Council found that numerous wooden houses had been erected without approval and that it had been difficult to get the occupants to comply with its regulations (CC Architect and Building Surveyor's Department, *Annual Report*, 1956, p. 9).

Responsibility without Power: Colonial Public Housing

The SIT's policy towards unauthorised wooden housing was more aggressive than that of the City Council. In 1947, the Trust began to construct "low-cost" housing within four miles of the Central Area, which entailed the displacement of large urban kampong communities. In 1952, when the SIT assumed control of Crown lands in the Kallang Basin, Kampong Alexandra and Henderson Road, an estimated 1,000 of the 2,400 families staying in wooden dwellings under TOLs in these areas faced clearance within two years due to housing and industrial development (SIT, *Annual Report*, 1952, p. 39). In the same year, as an adjunct to its public housing project, the government established "squatter resettlement areas" for kampong dwellers evicted from Crown or Council lands, mostly located outside the City.[18] In 1957, there were 18 such resettlement areas, with 16 more awaiting acquisition (SIT, *Annual Report*, 1957, p. 29).

The SIT's clearance programs encountered significant non-violent resistance and obstruction. In 1954, when the Trust tried to clear over 300 families in Kampong Henderson, 69 families registered for Trust housing at nearby Brickworks Estate, while 120 applied to move to a resettlement area.[19] However, the farmers relocated to rural resettlement areas found that their transport costs had risen due to the greater travelling distances to town (Horsley, 1956, pp. 125–35). Some families rejected the Brickworks housing because the monthly rental was simply too high.[20] Others who had initially moved into the flats elected to return to Kampong Henderson,[21] while new settlers occupied vacated wooden dwellings in the kampong

without authorisation.[22] The dwellers, in a petition to the authorities, strongly felt that the "[a]ttap houses were built to house the dwellers permanently".[23] Owing to the difficulty of resettlement, the Henderson clearance was, by early 1956, "dormant".[24]

But, as the 1950s wore on, the SIT, like the municipal authorities, discovered that unauthorised housing dwellers faced with eviction were also not afraid to defend their homes. Such resistance to demolition was frequently, although not always, spontaneous and likened to "a lion's roar from the oppressed people" (*Nanyang Siang Pau*, 1 May 1954). The contestation involved people who, in some way, stood on the periphery of colonial society – wooden house dwellers, women and gangsters, as well as leftist politicians, Chinese school students living in kampongs, and rural activists. The SIT found that most urban kampong residents had either "political backing or the backing of hooligans or gangsters", and that demolition was so fraught with difficulty that even the presence of policemen was often insufficient.[25] Secret societies were deeply entrenched in the social and economic life of the kampongs and sought to protect their turf and constituents against hostile intruders. They physically challenged demolition squads on the spot. Demolition became "a dangerous process", with Lands Inspectors frequently facing "written, verbal or, even physical" intimidation on site (SIT, *Annual Report*, 1958, p. 35). In 1958, gangsters at Henderson Road successfully prevented a demolition attempt, and SIT officials were also assaulted in other kampongs, in all cases in the presence of police constables.[26]

In the face of increasing collective resistance, the British government realised the need for a coordinated policy attack on "squatters", unauthorised housing and unstable urban spaces. In 1952, the SIT began to collect demographic and social information on the urban kampongs for formulating a Master Plan, a 20-year development plan for Singapore. Top Trust planners emphatically cautioned the government that "efforts [that] must be made NOW" and "steps [that] must be taken AT THIS MOMENT" to lay down a "firm coordinated policy" and enable an enlarged SIT to expand the housing program.[27] In 1955, the Master Plan was completed and became the cornerstone of colonial and to a large extent PAP housing policy.

In relation to the urban kampongs, the Master Plan's thrust was containment, contraction and clearance. The Plan was based on the characteristically high modernist framework of zoning, which categorised land use according to residential, industrial or recreational functions. The Plan held that "[t]he Attap Dwelling will not be appropriate within the built-up precincts of a modern City",[28] and identified 154,900 dwellers who were being or were likely to be cleared due to development.[29] It accepted only 148,000 persons to reside in wooden housing in the City, nearly 100,000 fewer than the prevailing figure (Singapore, 1955, pp. 26–28). The Plan sought to resettle, over twenty years, 161,000 of 246,000 urban kampong dwellers in either permanent housing or resettlement areas. Some of the resettlement areas would be located in the urban area, housing 63,000 persons (Singapore, 1955, p. 51). The remaining 85,000 dwellers were allowed to remain in 16 urban kampongs designated as "tolerated attap areas". Dwellings in these kampongs had to meet strict housing standards: a distance of 15 feet between walls of non-flammable materials such as brick or corrugated iron, or 25 feet for flammable materials; a concrete floor and drain; and corrugated iron walls for the kitchen as a fire precaution.[30]

The vast majority of the settlements were categorised as ''insanitary kampongs''. The planners felt that ''[l]iving conditions in these areas are very bad'' and could ''only be rendered healthy by a planned programme of clearance and rebuilding''. Such kampongs were simply marked for clearance.[31] The Master Plan entailed the demolition of 3,200 wooden houses and the rehousing of 22,400 persons in public housing in the next five years, with a further 32,500 kampong dwellers to be displaced within ten years.[32] Finally, in place of the ''Black Belt'' of wooden dwellings on the urban fringe, the Plan envisaged a ''Green Belt'' of ''open space around the City to limit its spread'' (Singapore, 1958, p. 7). However, despite the formulation of the Master Plan, its implementation was fraught with great difficulty. In 1957, ''racketeers'' were moving into the ''tolerated'' kampongs to build more ''barrack-type wooden houses''. The authorities decided that these settlements should ''be sterilised'' and that no further building should be permitted.[33] However, in January 1959, the SIT found that ''no control was being exercised and haphazard building was taking place'', dooming the chances of clearing these areas.[34]

Similarly, the clearance of the ''insanitary kampongs'' encountered stiff, organised resistance. In 1956, when the SIT tried to demolish dilapidated wooden houses at Covent Garden, the house owners organised their tenants against accepting the Trust's flats in the suburb of Queenstown until a satisfactory rate of compensation had been agreed on.[35] This social solidarity underlined the levelling impact of eviction: it affected house owners and shopkeepers as well as poor tenants, and the resistance that emerged cut across class differences. The SIT worried over rumours that the dwellers were ''contemplating to engage thugs to give Trust inspectors and *jagas* [Indian watchmen stationed in the area] a thrashing''.[36] Wooden houses that had been sealed off were abruptly reopened by the owners to new tenants. In June, when the SIT's Estates Officer tried to seal off a dwelling, he was stopped by a house owner who had been organising the tenants. The confrontation quickly turned political, as the officer was firmly told that ''I was a European and had no right to issue directions affecting Asians''.[37] The following month, a female house owner struck a watchman, who was helping to clear a family from her dwelling, with a broom, ''presumably dirtied with excreta''.[38] The prominence of women in the resistance to eviction underlined the importance of the housing as a place for both family life and work. On another occasion, a Lands Inspector, accompanied by two policemen, was confronted by a man, apparently spurred on by two local women. He ''started to use abusive language'' and then ''threatened to assault us and later challenged us to a fight''.[39] In July 1958, the SIT conceded that it ''had no effective control of the area''.[40]

Politicising the Social Margin

The Covent Garden case provides some indication that urban kampong dwellers were being politicised. This was much clearer in other kampongs in the latter half of the 1950s, as politicians recognised the importance of mobilising the mass base living in the ''black areas''. The greatest political advances were made by the PAP, the most progressive political party in the 1950s. Its aim, Lee Kuan Yew explained later, was to bridge ''the gap to the Chinese-educated world – a world teeming with vitality, dynamism and revolution'' (Lee, 1962, pp. 10–11). Penetrating the ''Black

Belt'' was a key strategy in the PAP's efforts to mobilise the lower-income Chinese-speaking population. The revival of left-wing politics in Singapore in 1954 saw the rise of two powerful organisations closely associated with the PAP left and the Malayan Communist Party (MCP): the Singapore Farmers' Association (SFA) and the Singapore Wooden House Dwellers' Association (SWHDA), both formed in 1955.[41] While there was communist influence at the executive level of both organisations to a ''greater or lesser extent'' (Interview with Poh Soon Seng, 19 September 2006), both the SFA and SWHDA were firmly anti-colonial. As one activist explained, ''the purpose was to bring about the social consciousness of the people, raise their understanding of politics and unite them for the cause of the anti-colonial struggle'' (Interview with C.C. Chin, 24 November 2006).

The SFA and SWHDA sought to engage the wooden house population which, because of its low levels of employment and education, was not easily organised into labour or student unions. Their political work consequently crossed rural and urban boundaries and targeted a mixed Chinese kampong population of farmers and semi-urban and urban dwellers. For instance, Lim Chin Kok, President of both the SFA and the leading labour union, the Singapore Factory and Shop Workers' Union, could reach out to urban workers living in wooden houses (Interview with Chan Chiaw Thor, 23 September 2006).

The strength of the left-wing rural associations lay in their ability to uphold the interests of kampong dwellers. Chan Chiaw Thor, secretary of the SFA and regarded as ''the single most influential political figure in the rural areas'',[42] maintained that ''we worked hard to interview the farmers and understand their problems. We raised other people's problems to them and how we helped to solve them'' (Interview with Chan Chiaw Thor, 23 September 2006). A key area of social and political contention was the implementation of the Master Plan. The SFA criticised slum clearance as a typically ''tragic affair'' that failed to provide the affected dwellers with affordable alternative accommodation. Resettled farmers, it contended, were also not given adequate compensation for the loss of their houses, crops and farming equipment (*Petir*, June 1956, pp. 4–7). The SFA provided legal advice to the dwellers and drafted letters to the authorities and landowners on house construction and repair. Where, previously, kampong dwellers customarily faced the reality of having to submit to the demands of removal or offer bribes to officials, they could now effectively articulate and defend their own interests in the legal language of administrative authority.

The activists levelled the political playing field between low-income Chinese-speaking kampong dwellers and the colonial regime and landowners. As Poh Soon Seng, a leading SFA member, observed, the dwellers had previously been intimidated upon receiving legal letters ordering them to move out in a short time, as

> the landowners had lawyers write letters, sounding like an emperor, telling the tenants to move out by this date, and there was no mention of compensation. The residents, being ignorant, were frightened. With an association to represent them, they were no longer afraid and so landowners couldn't simply evict them (Interview with Poh Soon Seng, 19 September 2006).

Indeed, the political relationship was much reversed, as local officials and landowners, confronted with organised opposition, became far more wary of the

kampong dwellers. The authorities found that wooden house dwellers were "even more intractable to resettlement than people in central areas", because "the large numbers of ... people living in attap dwellings make them a political force of some magnitude and the banding together of such persons into protective associations are discouragements to rapid clearance".[43] By early 1956, the SFA and SWHDA each had a membership of 5,000 (Lee, 1996, p. 94, p. 131).

Both rural associations were crucial in helping to forge a potent alliance of workers, students and wooden house dwellers against colonial rule in the mid-1950s. Kampong dwellers frequently appeared at sites of industrial action, where workers belonging to left-wing unions were challenging employers over the right to unionise, better wages and working conditions. The kampong dwellers brought the strikers a steady supply of meat, vegetables and eggs (Interview with Poh Soon Seng, 19 September 2006). In July 1956, the SFA and SWHDA, jointly with the "Middle Road" group of left-wing unions, supported a PAP call for a united front for "Merdeka" ["independence"].[44] In September, when Chief Minister Lim Yew Hock began a massive crackdown on left-wing leaders and "Communist front organisations", he had been warned by the Special Branch that "a large number of Chinese workers, peasants and students in Singapore support [the] PAP, and this group, infiltrated by Communist elements, is likely to be the spearhead of disturbances".[45] Lim Yew Hock detained seven leading leftists, including Lim Chin Kok. The SFA and Middle Road unions immediately released a joint statement condemning the arrests and demanding the release of the detainees (*Nanyang Siang Pau*, 21 September 1956). The SWHDA similarly declared that the 6,000 families who were its members opposed the unlawful detention and demanded that the leaders be tried in an open court or be unconditionally released (*Nanyang Siang Pau*, 23 September 1956). When riots broke out on 25 October across the island, the rural associations were accused of supporting the violence and subsequently deregistered.[46]

The 1956 riots have customarily been viewed in Singapore history within the framework of the "Communist united front" master narrative, without due regard for the thinking of the ordinary people who were involved. The transformation of a large part of Singapore's population from one that had contested colonial authority passively to one that overtly challenged the British establishment was not primarily due to manipulation by MCP cadres but, rather, to the prevailing social and economic circumstances. Pulling together the threads of 1950s anti-colonial politics and the depth of oppression suffered by the kampong dwellers, it is striking how *ordinary* and *rational* the riots in fact were. Whether the violence was triggered by communist or government provocateurs, wooden house dwellers, workers and students were struggling, in Arlette Farge's words, for order, not against it, for justice and honour, "giving shape and form to what is lacking and what it is that has to be overcome" (Farge, 1993, p. 260).

Within months of the proscription of the SFA and SWHDA, many of their members joined the Singapore Country People's Association (SCPA) and the Singapore Rural Residents' Association (SRRA) (Lee, 1996, p. 137). Again, MCP cadres and members of the left-wing Anti-British League dominated key positions in both associations and their branches (Interview with C.C. Chin, 24 November 2006). By 1960, the membership of both associations had risen rapidly to 2,500 and 3,000

respectively,[47] and continued to do so after the PAP came to power in 1959. Despite their names, the SCPA and SRRA were open to residents of "Kampongs within the existing City Limits".[48] In engaging kampong dwellers, the SCPA and SRRA were keenly involved in their social life. They organised the young village men into crime patrols and fire-fighting squads, and helped the residents to repair wooden houses, roads and bridges, clear drains and clean pig stys. They also ran sports, dance and singing events, sewing classes, kindergartens, and literacy classes (Interviews with C.C. Chin, 24 November 2006, and Chio Cheng Thun, 7 March 2007). Both associations were decidedly anti-colonial and their cultural and educational activities allegedly contained a "strong Chinese Communist flavour".[49]

The PAP's ability to penetrate the "black areas" and mobilise low-income Chinese kampong dwellers was instrumental in its resounding victory in the 1959 general elections. The party won 43 of 51 seats in the Legislative Assembly. The party's ascendancy also transformed the structure of the colonial civil administration. The SIT was dissolved in 1960, and its housing and planning responsibilities were transferred to two new agencies – the Housing and Development Board and the Planning Department, respectively. Similarly, the City Council, which had been an experiment in local government, was abolished, as the PAP sought to centralise the government and bureaucratic machinery (PAP, 1959, p. 28). The HDB was a fully-powered housing authority under the PAP's direct control, and shouldered sole responsibility for tackling the housing problem.

Clearance by Fire

However, the actual clearance of the urban kampongs was initially as deeply problematic for the HDB as it had been for the SIT. Under the State Development Plan for 1961–65, the Board aimed to redevelop 1,300 acres of land within five miles of the Central Area (*SLAD*, 12 April 1961, pp. 1282–83). The building work would be concentrated in the more peripheral northern and eastern parts of the City in Queenstown and Toa Payoh (Ministry of Finance, 1961, pp. 121–23), the latter envisaged as a massive satellite town with 50,000 flats and a population of 300,000 (*SLAD*, 24 May 1961, pp. 1467–68). In 1960, the HDB continued to remove kampong dwellers from the Queenstown area and established a committee to plan the clearance of Toa Payoh (HDB, *Annual Report*, 1960, p. 26, pp. 34–35). But kampong dwellers quickly began to make representations to the PAP government in protest (HDB, *Annual Report*, 1960, p. 31). The HDB consequently experienced a slow start to its building project. By April 1961, the Board had built only 2,112 units of housing in the 14 months since its inception, not overly impressive compared to the SIT's average of 2,200 units per year (SIT, *Annual Report*, 1959, p. 2).

This impasse was broken by the outbreak of Singapore's biggest fire at Kampong Bukit Ho Swee on 25 May 1961, destroying 2,200 dwellings and rendering 15,694 people homeless. But it was the emergency rehousing program that followed that made this the most significant fire in Singapore's history. The inferno underscored the important role of kampong fires in the making of a high modernist City. Decisively utilising the state of emergency occasioned by the scale of the disaster, the PAP responded, unlike the British government, with political resolve and speed. On 30 May, Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew promised that "[i]n nine

months' time a sufficient number of units will be completed by the Housing and Development Board to house every fire victim family'' (*Straits Times*, 30 May 1961). In a special Legislative Assembly session convened the following day, the PAP government passed a motion to acquire the fire site for rebuilding and an amendment to the Land Acquisition Ordinance to enable the government to acquire fire sites at one-third of the unencumbered value of the land (*SLAD*, 31 May 1961, pp. 1565–66).

The HDB made the rebuilding of Bukit Ho Swee its top priority.[50] Within a week of the fire, a preliminary plan to redevelop the fire site had been prepared.[51] By this time, too, the Board had accepted the need to build a large quantity of emergency housing; such housing could be constructed quickly and cheaply but the SIT had largely rejected it as being difficult and costly to maintain (SIT, *Annual Report*, 1956, p. 16, p. 19). The HDB, however, recognised that ''political considerations were more pressing and that the Housing Board might have to sacrifice its ideas on what units should be constructed''.[52] In September 1961, within four months of the Bukit Ho Swee fire, 904 one-room emergency flats at the nearby Tiong Bahru cemetery site had been completed, comprising the first phase of the redevelopment of the fire site. More than 700 of the flats were allocated to the Bukit Ho Swee fire victims. A second building contract was completed in November 1962. By the end of 1963, of the 2,600 fire victim families registered with the HDB for rehousing, 2,166 families had been successfully accommodated.[53] That year, the Board proudly declared that ''[t]he appearance of Bukit Ho Swee Fire Site had been completely changed from one of the most congested slums in Singapore into that of a healthy housing estate with modern community services and amenities'' (HDB, *Annual Report*, 1963, p. 28).

Bukit Ho Swee Estate was a planned, high modernist housing estate, in which formerly semi-autonomous kampong dwellers were being moulded into disciplined citizens. The development of public housing constituted, the HDB proclaimed in 1964, ''a minor revolution in the social and living habits of a sizeable portion of the population'' (PAP, 1964, p. 228). Residents were reminded not to keep livestock in the house, obstruct the common corridors and stairways, illegally sublet their flat, or make unauthorised alterations, things they had been accustomed to doing in the kampong (HDB, 1973, p. 5). The estate's social amenities also aimed to draw former kampong dwellers firmly into the official orbit. The community centre, completed in 1965, sought to transform the local youth into ''loyal and efficient young people to collectively shoulder the responsibility in nation-building'' (National Archives of Singapore, 7 May 1966). The movement of hawkers also came under official regulation. In 1966, at the opening of a 2-storey hawker centre in the estate, a government official enthused that hawkers would no longer be a cause of traffic obstruction or a health hazard but could now ''do their business in sheltered comfort'', while the residents could ''enjoy the many varieties of cooked food in clean, sanitary surroundings'' (National Archives of Singapore, 26 May 1966).

Crucially, too, Bukit Ho Swee's emergency flats served as a vital springboard for the government's public housing program. By transforming the urban margins, followed by the urban core, the HDB envisaged that ''a planned new city will be built''.[54] The clearance and redevelopment of the urban kampongs was key to the Board's subsequent urban renewal program, since the emergency housing built on

the sites of former kampongs was used to accommodate families cleared from the Central Area. As Teh Cheang Wan, the HDB's Chief Architect, later remarked, the Board's "building programme would have run into difficulties if not for the God-sent opportunity of the Bukit Ho Swee fire in 1961 where a site was made available for 10,000 units of flats".[55] Two-thirds of the people who eventually moved into Bukit Ho Swee Estate were not victims of the 1961 fire. In September 1962, a number of flats on the estate were reserved for kampong families affected by the clearance of nearby Redhill for industrial and housing development.[56] From July the following year, another cluster of flats was allocated, in order of priority, to evicted families from the clearance areas; victims of the Bukit Ho Swee and Bukit Ban Kee fires; and general applicants on the housing register.[57] In October 1964, the Board opened more vacant flats in the estate to applicants evicted from nearby South Precinct 1 due to the urban renewal program.[58] By 1966, there were 12,562 flats in Bukit Ho Swee Estate, housing an estimated 75,000 people, five times the number that had previously lived in the kampong (HDB, *Annual Report*, 1967, p. 51).

Proscription by the PAP

The Bukit Ho Swee fire not only kickstarted the HDB's public housing program but also gave the Board the vital self-belief to accomplish the task. What was also important for the HDB was the full support it received from the PAP government in breaking down organised resistance to rehousing. In September 1961, following the split between the Lee Kuan Yew group and the PAP left, the latter formed the Barisan Sosialis. The Singapore Country People's Association and Singapore Rural Residents' Association supported the new party.[59] In 1961–62, the rural associations organised resistance to the PAP's merger campaign and the resettlement of wooden house dwellers in Toa Payoh.[60] The associations had an estimated combined membership of 12,000 to 15,000 in late 1961. The SCPA, which claimed to represent 25,000 villagers in Toa Payoh alone,[61] objected that the clearance would inflict economic hardship on the villagers, and demanded higher rates of compensation.[62] By April 1962, the organised resistance had slowed the first phase of the Toa Payoh clearance.[63] In Potong Pasir, the SRRA represented 174 landowners protesting the Board's decision to increase land rents in late 1961.[64] The SCPA also organised stiff resistance in 1962–63 to the government's Kallang Basin Reclamation Project, demanding appropriate compensation for the evicted dwellers and guarantees of their livelihood after resettlement (Gamer, 1972, pp. 66–70).

A coalescing international entente of conservative forces, however, smashed the resistance to rehousing. The PAP repeatedly warned the Malayan and British colonial governments of a deepening communist threat to their respective security interests in the region. In February 1963, a massive purge orchestrated by the PAP, Malayan and British colonial governments, termed Operation Cold Store, detained the leading leftists on charges of conspiracy to create a "Cuba in Singapore" through violent revolution (*Straits Times*, 3 February 1963). In the snap general elections held in September, the PAP won 37 of 51 seats, with the severely-weakened Barisan obtaining 13. The SCPA and SRRA were charged with "agitation on behalf of the Communists" and operating "recruiting and training centres for Communist

cadres in the rural areas'', and were deregistered in November (*Straits Times*, 4 October 1963). The purges decimated the left-wing movement in Singapore. The PAP government's rehousing plans could now proceed.[65] Wooden house dwellers in Toa Payoh gradually accepted the HDB's compensation and rehousing terms,[66] enabling over a hundred acres to be cleared the following year (HDB, *Annual Report*, 1964, pp. 40–41).

Throughout the 1960s, high modernist HDB estates steadily replaced the kampongs on the margins of Singapore City. A total of 12,829 families were evicted from their homes between 1960 and 1965; of these, three-quarters moved to planned resettlement areas or accepted HDB flats, with the remainder finding their own accommodation in the dwindling number of shophouse cubicles or wooden houses. By 1965, in the new urban periphery within a five-mile radius of the Central Area stood 54,430 units of public housing flats, accommodating 430,000 people or 23 per cent of the population. In celebrating the achievements of the HDB's first 5-year plan, Lee Kuan Yew proudly stated that ''Singapore is a proud city. It is acquiring the one hallmark of a great civilised community, magnificent buildings plus comparable workers' housing'' (HDB, 1966, p. 1). After having restored the social margin and the urban core, the HDB proceeded to build self-contained satellite towns in the rural areas (Singapore, 1965, pp. 92–96). The result was a marked reduction in the autonomy of Chinese families, which hitherto had the freedom to move homes and sublet, rent, build or rebuild their houses on their own terms. They were being progressively integrated into the social and economic life of the emergent nation-state.

Conclusion

This paper has sought to highlight the important role of public housing development in the making of a high modernist nation-state in postwar Singapore. The increasingly intense struggle over urban kampong clearance at the physical and social margins of the City testified to the ambition of British colonial planners to transform ''squatters'' into Singaporeans. By the latter half of the 1950s, this rehousing campaign had been brought to a virtual standstill by the effective organisation of kampong dwellers by left-wing rural associations aligned with the PAP. Yet it is testament to the tremendous appeal of high modernism to political elites seeking to transform Singapore into a rejuvenated nation-state that the philosophy found adherents across the ideological divide. Upon coming to power, the PAP seized the opportunity provided by a massive kampong fire to kickstart its public housing project. It also launched a determined crackdown on the left, eliminating the very radical forces that had helped bring the party to power, and ending any hope that the citizenry could remain to an extent autonomous of the state. Located at the interface between social and political history, emergency urban kampong clearance and public housing development on the urban periphery were just as important in the making of modern Singapore as the island's parliamentary politics.

The transformation of the urban kampong population in Singapore into an integrated citizenry contrasts significantly with the Hong Kong experience, where the British colonial regime vacillated in its approach to the squatter problem. The

difference between the two countries is largely due to political leadership. In Hong Kong, the presence of a tentative colonial administration undermined the squatter clearance campaign. In Singapore, by contrast, the program was much more robustly pursued by a postcolonial government that had acquired the mantle and methods of colonial kampong clearance but also possessed a singular will to reconfigure state-society relations towards the creation of a high modernist city-state. The role of the state, the nature of local society and the colonial context are useful points of reference for rethinking squatter clearance in other Asian cities after the war. Beyond Hong Kong, we need to look past existing narratives of failure of squatter clearance in order to reconceptualise these experiences as a shared historical phenomenon. It is crucial to understand that public housing developments in postwar Asia did not simply aim to meet the needs of growing populations; neither should the relative success or failure of such programs and the social resistance they encountered be attributed merely to the presence or absence of adequate official planning or resources. Squatter clearance campaigns were also ambitious projects to mobilise families *en masse* at a point in time when ruling elites, both colonial and postcolonial, were imagining the creation or rejuvenation of the modern nation-state in the waning years of Western colonialism. We need, in particular, to examine the larger impact of these projects on state-society relations. Even where official efforts had ostensibly faltered or failed, it is important to discern the social and political forces that inhibited the integration of the citizenry into the fabric of the nation-state. We will then be able to begin to understand what these squatter clearance programs truly *were* and what they *meant* to the people they targeted.

Notes

1. HB 659/53, Report on the Demolition of Three Timber and Attap Houses on Singapore Improvement Trust (henceforth SIT) Land at Lorong 27, Geylang, on 17 July 1953 by Acting Lands Manager, 22 July 1953.
2. A4231/1949/Singapore, Despatch from Australian Commissioner for Malaya to Secretary, Department of External Affairs, 16 March 1949.
3. SIT 475/47, Notes for Discussion on Housing by Commissioner of Lands, 13 June 1947. ''C3'' was a rating in the British classification of medical fitness for military service during World War I, and referred to someone unfit for combat duty. The term was subsequently extended to populations and nations. The wooden houses were customarily called ''attap huts'' because many of them had thatched roofs.
4. SIT 475/47, Notes for Discussion on Housing by Commissioner of Lands, 13 June 1947.
5. SIT 183/52, Letter from Aung Peang and Teo Ah Beh to Lands Manager, SIT, 8 October 1954.
6. SIT 70/1/53, Memo titled 'Resettlement Areas for Attap Dwellers' by Commissioner of Lands, 1 October 1952.
7. SIT 952/50, Comments on Memo by Commissioner of Lands on the Problem of Squatters on Crown Land by Manager, SIT, 13 November 1950.
8. HB 722/55, Notes for Consideration of the ''Squatter Problem'' Working Party, undated, c. 1955.
9. SIT 770/55, Letter from Deputy Lands Manager, SIT, to Laycock and Ong, 2 December 1955.
10. SIT 770/55, Letter from Pek Cheng Siew to Estates Manager, SIT, 25 November 1955.
11. SIT 843/52, Memo from Acting Deputy Lands Manager, SIT, to Manager, SIT, 19 May 1953.
12. SIT 650/47, Memo titled 'Squatters on SIT Land' from Lands Section, SIT, to Manager, SIT, 22 September 1947.
13. SIT 808/50, Draft Report of the Attap Dwellings Special Committee, undated, c. 1951.
14. HB 408/52, Letter from Yap Pheng Geck to Manager, SIT, 11 July 1952.

15. HB 659/53, Senior Assistant Commissioner's Directive No. 20/55 titled 'Evictions Policy and SIT', 2 August 1955.
16. HB 659/53, Report on the Demolition of Three Structures at Toa Payoh on 26 August 1955 by Deputy Collector of Land Revenue, 31 August 1955.
17. SIT 462/53, Memo from Lands Inspector, SIT, to Senior Lands Inspector, SIT, 24 September 1953.
18. HB 711/53, Memo from Chairman, SIT, to Commissioner of Lands, 16 October 1953.
19. SIT 521/1/29, Letter from Acting Deputy Lands Manager, SIT, to Mak Pak Shee, 13 August 1954.
20. SIT 140/54, Memo from Acting Deputy Lands Manager, SIT, to Estates Officer, SIT, 23 September 1954.
21. SIT 140/54, Memo from Senior Lands Inspector, SIT, to Estates Officer, SIT, 24 August 1955.
22. SIT 430/54, Schedule of Unauthorised Occupation at Kampong Henderson Noted on Inspection by the Deputy Lands Manager, 19 June 1956.
23. HB 908/50, Petition Addressed to the Secretary of Chinese Affairs by Four Representatives of the Villagers of the Henderson Road Area, undated, c. 1953.
24. SIT 140/54, Memo from Estates Officer, SIT, to Deputy Lands Manager, SIT, 28 March 1956.
25. HB 364/58, Memo from Lands Inspector to Acting Lands Officer, 28 May 1958.
26. HB 364/58, Memo from Lands Inspector to Acting Lands Officer, 28 May 1958.
27. SIT 617/54, Memo titled 'Housing Programmes and Policy' by Chief Architect, SIT, and Planning Adviser, SIT, 5 July 1954.
28. SIT 808/50, Report by George Pepler titled 'Attap Dwellings on Land Likely to be Required for Permanent Forms of Development in the City Area During the Next Five Years', 26 July 1952.
29. HB 1013/50, Memo by the Chief Planning Officer, Diagnostic Survey Team, 17 October 1954.
30. HB 477/53, Notes of a Discussion on a) Control of Unauthorised Buildings and b) Improvement of Kampongs, 14 November 1957.
31. HB 925/54, Memo from Chief Planning Officer, Diagnostic Survey Team, to Acting Chief Architect, SIT, 15 November 1954.
32. SIT 808/50, Appendix A of Report by George Pepler titled 'Attap Dwellings on Land Likely to be Required for Permanent Forms of Development in the City Area During the Next Five Years', 26 July 1952.
33. HB 477/53, Notes of a Discussion on the Improvement of Kampongs, 7 March 1957.
34. HB 16/59, Notes of a Meeting of Officers to Consider Housing Policy, 16 January 1959.
35. HB 125/14/47, Notes of a Meeting to Discuss Proposed Action in Connection with Covent Garden Improvement Scheme, 9 December 1957.
36. HB 125/16/47, Memo from Rehousing Officer, SIT, to Senior Rehousing Assistant, SIT, 23 August 1957.
37. HB 125/16/47, Memo from Estates Officer, SIT, to Estates and Lands Manager, SIT, 12 June 1956.
38. HB 125/16/47, Memo from Rehousing Assistant, SIT, to Estates Officer, SIT, 11 July 1956.
39. HB 125/16/47, Memo from Acting Estates Officer, SIT, to Estates Officer, SIT, 4 June 1957.
40. HB 1139/56, Memo from Estates Manager, SIT, to Acting Manager, SIT, 16 July 1958.
41. The PAP left referred to the radical socialist, pro-communist faction of the party and was distinct from the more centrist, Fabian socialist group headed by Lee Kuan Yew.
42. RG 59, 746F.00/9-1561, Despatch from US Consul General to Department of State titled 'Left-Wingers in Rural Areas Desert the PAP', 15 September 1961.
43. HB 477/53, Report titled 'Housing' by the Planning Coordination Committee, undated, c. 1959.
44. CO 1030/240, Report of the Singapore Local Intelligence Committee, 4–26 July 1956.
45. FO 1091/46, Report titled 'Internal Security Appreciation – Singapore and the Federation of Malaya' by Chief of Staff, Malaya Command, 17 April 1956.
46. CO 1030/241, Monthly Intelligence Report, 13 October–30 November 1956. Former members of the SFA, however, deny the allegations. They maintain that while individual members could have been involved, the organisation firmly adopted a constitutional approach (Interviews with Chan Chiaw Thor, 15 September 2006 and 23 September 2006; and with Poh Soon Seng, 19 September 2006).
47. FO 1091/106, Singapore Intelligence Committee Report, 13–26 August 1959.

48. ME 481/58, Constitution of the Singapore Country People's Association, 1958.
49. RG 59, 746F.00/9-1561, Despatch from US Consul General to Department of State titled 'Left-Wingers in Rural Areas Desert the PAP', 15 September 1961.
50. HB 16/59 Vol. I, Memo from Chairman, HDB, to Minister of Finance, 20 October 1961.
51. HB 99/48 Vol. II, Report of the Building Department, May 1961.
52. HB 871/57, Memo from Chief Executive Officer, HDB, to Members of the Board, 10 October 1960.
53. HB 147/51 Vol. V, Statement of Rehousing Scheme by Estates Department, December 1963.
54. HB 141/52, Memo from Chief Executive Officer, HDB, to Permanent Secretary, Ministry of National Development, 11 August 1964.
55. HB 1013/50 Vol. I, Memo from Chief Architect, HDB, to Chief Executive Officer, HDB, 4 December 1963.
56. HB 178/59 Vol. II, Minutes of Allocations Committee Meeting on 27 September 1962.
57. HB 178/59 Vol. II, Minutes of Allocations Committee Meeting on 2 July 1963.
58. HB 178/59 Vol. III, Minutes of Allocations Committee Meeting on 7 October 1964.
59. RG 59, 746F.00/9-1561, Despatch from US Consul General to Department of State titled 'Left-Wingers in Rural Areas Desert the PAP', 15 September 1961.
60. RG 59, 746F.00/9-1561, Despatch from US Consul General to Department of State titled 'Left-Wingers in Rural Areas Desert the PAP', 15 September 1961; HB 1166/57, Memo from Resettlement Officer, HDB, to Chief Executive Officer, HDB, 16 August 1963.
61. HB 722/3/55, Minutes of Meeting with SCPA Representatives, 26 March 1962.
62. HB 722/3/55, Memo from SCPA to Toa Payoh Clearance Liaison Committee, 8 July 1961.
63. HB 722/3/55, Minutes of Board Meeting, 12 April 1962.
64. HB 364/58, Memo from Lands Officer, HDB, to Acting Lands Manager, HDB, 5 December 1961; and Letter from General Secretary, SRRA, to Minister for National Development, 23 November 1961.
65. A1838/751/2 Part II, Singapore Economic Summary by the American Consulate General, 4th Quarter, 1964.
66. CO 1030/1597, Memo titled 'Public Housing in Singapore' by the UK Commission, 16 April 1963.

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