Now the government, never one to rest on its laurels where the economy is concerned, is pushing two new plans to spur growth. The first represents a diversification move: taking some of the nation's foreign reserves and investing them in companies overseas—a plan that includes building schools abroad for the children of Singaporeans sent to work for those companies. The second is what is called a growth triangle. Instead of pushing out the remaining low-wage factories and rejecting new ones, Singapore is working jointly with Malaysia and Indonesia to locate such factories in the southern Malaysian state of Johore and in Indonesia's Riau Islands—both adjacent to Singapore—while keeping the manufacturers' corporate headquarters in Singapore itself. The strategy is brilliant: not only does Singapore get new skilled jobs but the country—a Chinese island dwarfed by neighboring Muslim states that posed a real threat in the 1960s—can make the Malaysian and Indonesian economies increasingly dependent on Singapore's existence. "In the Riau Islands, they've set up a joint venture with Indonesians," a Western diplomat explained to me. "This Riau authority is getting a lot of clout to bypass Jakarta's bureaucracy. If Jakarta were running it alone, nothing would happen. Jakarta has had a plan to develop the islands since the mid-1970s, and it had been 95 percent a failure. But now it's taking off. You have Singapore actively assisting Western companies to wade through the bureaucracy and corruption in Malaysia and Indonesia. Creating an economic region with Singapore as the hub insures Singapore's economic growth. And it's also providing political stability because of the growing economic interdependence."

Singapore, the bastion of capitalism, has never hesitated to establish government-owned companies. The government owns or controls some of the biggest banks and insurance companies and also shipyards, hotels, an oil refinery, a steel mill, trading organizations, and many other enterprises. At one point, it owned a driving range for golfers. Not surprisingly, the government's

business ventures are highly profitable—even the subway system and the power company—and now that stock in some of the ventures is being sold to the public, in a privatization move, the government is awash in cash. The best known of the government-owned enterprises is Singapore Airlines, which is a paragon of good management. The airline has made a profit every year since its founding, in 1972, and it earned over $500 million in the fiscal year that ended on March 31, 1991—a time when many other airlines had huge losses because the Gulf War reduced travel. Although Singapore is racked by violent thunderstorms most afternoons, Singapore Airlines has never had a crash. It upgrades its fleet so often that it is now replacing all its Boeing 747s with the newest model, the long-range 747-400.

While the government's big investments in private industry might run counter to the tenets of capitalism, Lee Kuan Yew maintains that they have been a vital ingredient in Singapore's economic success. "The only reason the government moved in was that no entrepreneur had the guts and the gumption and the capital to go in on his own," Lee told me. "So we went in and got it going, using government officials who had the drive and the flair. And we are prepared to go into more high-risk areas where Singaporean entrepreneurs are unable to carry that risk, either for lack of daring or for lack of capital."

Singapore acquired the capital to make these investments in an inventive way. The government devised a scheme, or plan—in Singapore, plans are always referred to as schemes—for forced savings on a huge scale. Called the Central Provident Fund, it now takes 34 percent of a worker's salary for a special retirement account; in the past, as much as 40 percent has been withheld. (By manipulating the percentage, the government can inject funds into the economy in periods of recession and cause more to be withheld during boom times, when inflation threatens.) The account pays interest, and the worker can withdraw funds before retirement, but for only two reasons: to buy certain blue-

chip stocks, like Singapore Airlines, or to buy a house or an apartment. The fund simultaneously accomplishes three important goals: the government gets a huge pool of investment capital, which at the end of 1990 stood at $23 billion; workers gain a stake in the capitalist system through their stock purchases and help support it at the same time; and Singapore becomes a nation of homeowners—homeowners who want prosperity and political stability to preserve their investment.

Most Singaporeans—87 percent of them—live in the sterile government-built apartment towers, which in some areas stretch so far that there is bus service from one side of an apartment block to the other. From the outside, these apartment blocks could be taken for a New York City housing project: all buildings identical, each without a hint of architectural merit. But the resemblance to New York City ends at their doors, for inside they're immaculate—completely free of vandalism, graffiti, and litter. The explanation lies in the fact that 90 percent of these units—and 80 percent of Singapore's dwellings overall—are owned by the families who live in them, and people aren't going to let the value of their investment drop because the building isn't kept up. The Singapore government builds the towers and then offers the apartments for sale, allowing the buyers to use their Central Provident money for both the down payment and the monthly mortgage payment. A five-room apartment far away from the central city typically sells for around $45,000; a unit closer in costs at least 50 percent more. An owner is free to sell the apartment after five years, and people who bought their apartments in the 1970s can now get somewhere between two and four times the original purchase price. Though the government has no love for those who depend on welfare, it isn't about to see impoverished people sleeping on Singapore's streets, so it rents some of the older, smaller apartments at heavily subsidized prices. Several hundred people—such as families in which the father has been arrested for drug peddling and the mother and children are left penniless—live in government housing free.

Creating a nation of homeowners has done more than keep the housing stock from deteriorating; it has also provided insurance against political or racial revolution, since those who rebel would be acting against their own economic interests. "Underneath everything is the housing policy," Mary Lee, a Singapore journalist, says. "An ordinary office worker can own his own apartment—a situation that would be the envy of anyone in the United States. The government decided that the way to keep the population quiet was to give everyone a stake." The housing situation isn't quite tidy enough, however, to deter the government's rule-makers from stepping in, as they do in almost every other aspect of Singapore life. A single person can buy only a small apartment, and in a less popular area, because "the government thinks if you make it easier for singles they won't get married, and we want to encourage them to have families," I was told by Lim Hng Kiang, then the chief executive officer of the Housing and Development Board. The government also sets size limits for dogs allowed to live in its apartment buildings. And, just in case the pride of homeownership is overwhelmed by an urgent situation, elevators in the apartment blocks are equipped with urine detectors. When the detector senses the ammonia in urine, it locks the elevator doors and activates a hidden camera. An alarm rings at the Housing and Development Board, and the police are dispatched. If the culprit is a child, the parents get a letter of warning. An adult finds himself faced with another of those stiff Singapore fines, and this one can amount to as much as $1,240. On occasion, moreover, the offender will discover his name, or even his picture, in the *Straits Times*. Perhaps fearing that the threat of a fine and unwanted publicity might not be enough, the government also tries to reason with its citizens. When I visited a housing project, I saw a large photographic

exhibit on how to take proper care of elevators. One panel was captioned, "Urine causes the lift parts to corrode and makes the elevator smelly."

While Singapore is hardly the entertainment center of Asia, it does offer one pleasant distraction from making money and obeying rules. On days off, families can take an aerial tramway to nearby Sentosa Island, a large and beautiful theme park. Sentosa Island features a wax museum depicting pioneers of Singapore, an old fort from colonial times, nature walks, formal gardens, birds, and displays of coral and butterflies. A monorail circles the island; the stops are numbered, and visitors get a brochure listing the attractions at each stop. The brochure, however, won't inform them about Sentosa Island's one permanent resident, who lives at Stop No. 6, in a guardhouse next to the old fort. Singaporeans seem to have little sense of irony, but tourists who happen upon him and hear his story are astonished to find such a man in a theme park. His name is Chia Thye Poh, and he is currently Singapore's only political prisoner—a man whose life bears a remarkable resemblance to that of Nelson Mandela.

No one guards Chia Thye Poh these days. He is free to receive visitors; his room in the guardhouse, though it is sparsely furnished, has a telephone, and he is confined to Sentosa Island only from 9:00 p.m. to 6:00 a.m. For this degree of freedom, however, Chia Thye Poh has paid a very high price—more than twenty-two years in jail. It's hard to envision Chia as an enemy of anyone, and he certainly doesn't seem a threat to the powerful nation of Singapore. When I visited him, I found a rail-thin man wearing black-rimmed glasses, shower sandals, and white shorts, who was soft-spoken, almost meek, and extraordinarily deferential. He showed a constant concern about my comfort—going to the fort's snack bar to get me a drink, moving my chair so

that I would be more directly under the fan. Chia's deeply rooted graciousness and a total absence of ego made his story all the more poignant.

From 1963 to 1966, Chia, a university lecturer in physics, was a member of Parliament from the Barisan Sosialis Party (*barisan* is a Malay word for "front"), a left-leaning group that had split with Lee Kuan Yew's PAP over the issue of Singapore's joining the Malaysian Federation. "We wanted a genuinely democratic Malaysia, including Singapore," Chia said. "We fought for genuine parliamentary democracy, for a rule of law, not rule by one or two ministers. The PAP branded this as toeing the line of the Communist Party of Malaya. After the 1963 elections, three opposition M.P.'s were arrested, and two more in 1966. There were hundreds of other arrests over those years, because many people went out to demonstrate. The government used all means to try to suppress the opposition. In October of 1966, the Barisan M.P.'s resigned because of government harassment. Important issues like Singapore's withdrawal from the federation were never debated in Parliament, since Parliament had become a rubber stamp."

Three weeks after the resignations, Chia was one of the organizers of a rally to protest the Vietnam War, which took place on the eve of a visit to Singapore by President Lyndon Johnson. The rally marked Chia's last day of freedom. He was arrested in the course of the rally, under provisions of the Internal Security Act, which Singapore's government has used against hundreds of political opponents. The act, inherited from the British, allows detention for an unlimited number of two-year periods, without charges and without judicial review. "I was never charged, never brought to trial, never convicted of anything," Chia told me. Only nineteen years later, in 1985, did the government give its first official explanation for his arrest: the minister of home affairs, in an address to Parliament, accused Chia of having infiltrated the Barisan Sosialis to destabilize the govern-

ment through "Communist united-front activities." Chia told me, "They released no sort of documents. I have never been a member of any Communist Party; I was just performing my duties as an M.P. My activities were all legal, peaceful, and constitutional. I have never advocated violence, and have never been charged with any offense of violence, let alone convicted."

Chia, unlike most other political detainees in Singapore, resisted all attempts to extract a confession. "They tried very hard to break prisoners, to extract confessions from them, to have them confess on television," Chia said. "They made me pay a very high price for not kowtowing to them. In 1966, they put me in a dark cell and said some people had gone insane under such conditions. Sometimes you could hear people kicking the doors as if they had gone insane. I went from one prison to another and was in solitary confinement several times. Sometimes I was deprived of reading material for months at a stretch. They said that there's no end to this, that it will go on year after year if I don't confess, that even if I'm made of steel they have means to break me. I told them that I had nothing to confess, and that if the government had evidence it should try me in open court, where I could see the evidence against me and defend myself. There were daylong interrogations in a freezing-cold room. They pressured my family. But I always thought, No matter how long they keep me this way, someday they will have to release me, because I'm innocent and I have support. It's part of the broad struggle for democracy all over the world. When you are in solitary, there is nothing in the cell. But you can explore, and see faint scribblings from previous prisoners. I still remember one of them. It was a poem in Chinese: 'Ten years behind bars / Never too late / Thousands of ordeals / My spirit steeled.' When you were alone and helpless, and you saw things like that, you were encouraged."

The parallel between Chia Thye Poh and Nelson Mandela, two prisoners of conscience accused of Communist subversion,

is striking. Each was in jail for more than twenty years, at least part of the time confined to an island. Each had the opportunity to go free if he would abandon his political goals, and each refused. Chia said that the similarity wasn't lost on his interrogators. "They were telling me that Mandela remained in jail because he had lots of outside support," Chia said. "But they said there's no point in my remaining in jail, because no one remembers me. Mandela at least got a chance to defend himself in court, and now he's a free man. He can travel all over the world. He can take part in politics in South Africa, where the situation is far more tense than in Singapore. But I'm still not free. I don't know why the government should keep me here."

Singapore is clearly different from South Africa: the denial of rights is much more arbitrary and has never been aimed exclusively at the Malay and Indian minorities. Nor is Singapore—as even some former political detainees pointed out when I interviewed them—like Argentina under the generals. "The government knows where to stop," I was told by one of these detainees, who asked not to be identified. "They don't shoot us. They don't maim us. They allow you rehabilitation after you're out." This man said that while he was in jail he was "stripped time and again, blindfolded for three days, kept in an underground windowless room that was very cold." He added, "They had an interrogator who could shout into my ears for twelve hours straight. But on the tenth day, when I was hyperventilating from the cold and the pressure, they rushed me to the hospital."

Yet, short of physical torture and disappearances at night, the human rights record of the Singapore government much more resembles that of a Third World dictatorship than that of an industrial and technological powerhouse whose economy is intertwined with that of the West. Singapore is a prosperous nation with little racial animosity, no external threat, and a government that is genuinely popular, because of the economic growth it has brought. In the eyes of many Westerners, Singapore should have

achieved political, cultural, and social freedom as an inevitable companion to the high level of economic development. But Singapore's record lags not only in contrast to the records of Western democracies but also when it is compared with the records of its neighbors, who have their own problems with human rights. Singapore manages to control its citizens more pervasively than does Indonesia, a country that has known bloody repression. It has allowed its press less freedom than has Thailand, even during the period from February 1991 to June 1992, when that nation was under the control of a military junta. The city of Penang, in Malaysia—a nation that has its own Internal Security Act and whose government frequently takes heavy-handed action against political opponents—is filled with public-interest groups that freely criticize the government, but such groups have never been allowed to exist in Singapore.

Several studies of human rights in Singapore have produced substantial evidence that the rule of law has on many occasions fallen victim to the whim of government. In July 1989, the Committee on International Human Rights of the New York City Bar Association visited Singapore to prepare a report financed by the Ford Foundation and the MacArthur Foundation. The report, released in December 1990, amounts to a devastating indictment. "What emerges from this review is a government that has been willing to decimate the rule of law for the benefit of its political interests," the report states. "Lawyers have been cowed to passivity, judges are kept on a short leash, and the law has been manipulated so that gaping holes exist in the system of restraints on government action toward the individual. Singapore is not a country in which individual rights have significant meaning." The United States government, although it is a close ally of Singapore, has also sharply criticized its human rights record. A human rights report issued by the State Department in March 1991 presents an extensive catalogue of abuses. It speaks of "political control of the press, courts, and religion" and points

to "credible reports" of mistreatment of detainees and "surveillance of opposition or dissident figures as well as some religious leaders."

Singapore abolished trial by jury in 1969, and judges, according to the State Department report, "have close ties to the Government and its leaders" and "are beholden to the Government for their appointments." In December 1988, a Singapore appellate court ruled against the government, ordering the release of four prisoners detained under the Internal Security Act. The next month, Parliament amended the constitution to eliminate judicial review of Internal Security Act detentions, and the amendment was made retroactive to 1971. In 1990, Parliament passed what is called the Maintenance of Religious Harmony Act, giving the government power to arrest religious workers who it feels are engaging in politics; this act also barred judicial review of their cases. Persons caught breaking into a house or stealing a car, and perpetrators of several other crimes, are subject to lashes with a cane as well as prison; in 1989, the government also decided to cane illegal immigrants. The Bar Association report describes the procedure: "When the rattan hits the bared buttocks, the skin disintegrates, leaving initially a white line and then a flow of blood. The victim must lie on his front for three weeks to a month because the buttocks are so sore."

The feeling of intimidation is increased by laws that are kept on the books but are not enforced, since they could be at any time. During the Vietnam War years, when long hair was connected with drugs and dissent, Singapore police would pull long-haired youths off the streets for involuntary haircuts. Though the regulation against "hair reaching below an ordinary shirt collar" remains, it is now violated by many young Malays. Though homosexuality can be punished by anything up to life imprisonment, one of the largest discotheques becomes male-only every Sunday night, and hundreds of young gay Chinese

men gather there to dance and to flirt—but such activities are kept discreet. Though prostitution is illegal, three streets are lined with brothels, and the government requires all prostitutes to get a venereal disease check every two weeks and an HIV test every three months. Many Singaporean men, however, prefer to violate Thailand's prostitution laws.

Opponents of the government have a difficult life in Singapore. The State Department report charges that in the universities "tenure and renewal of appointments can be, and have been, refused to academics whose work deviates from government views." It also points to "substantial evidence that the authorities conduct clandestine searches of the baggage of opposition figures in the airport baggage-handling area." Demonstrations, except for those supporting the government, almost never occur in Singapore. In fact, aside from social gatherings, assemblies of more than five people in public must have police permission. When I interviewed Prime Minister Goh, the government had just announced sharp tuition increases for the universities. I asked him why students wouldn't be allowed to unfurl a banner requesting that the increases be scaled back. "If you allow students to do so, then workers will begin to do so over the slightest grievance," Goh replied. "And if you have several such demonstrations, right away the impression is created that government is not in control of the situation—that the place may became unstable. That will have an impact on foreign investors."

In the area of human rights, the Bar Association committee sees a design resembling that of the former Marxist governments of Eastern Europe. "A basic strategy of the totalitarian governments that were recently toppled in Eastern Europe was to keep society atomized, to keep discontent something that can be whispered among friends but that cannot be transformed into a social movement because people are too fearful to join together as a political force," the report says. "This effort to prevent the formation of a civil society has been the principal strategy of the Singapore government."

When I interviewed a member of the political opposition, he called Singapore "a city of fear." There is much evidence to support this characterization. For instance, in 1990 Russell Heng, who is now a researcher for the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, wrote a report on Singapore that was called "Give Me Liberty or Give Me Wealth" and was financed by the Rockefeller Foundation. "Two years ago, a Cabinet Minister urged academics and professionals to speak up," he noted in the study. "But when two reporters tried to get the reaction of eighteen of them to the Minister's encouragement, six preferred to keep their views to themselves. Of the remaining twelve, six spoke only on condition of anonymity." Heng also observed that "talking to people for this essay brought some firsthand experience of the irrational fear which exists even among the best-educated Singaporeans," and noted, "One example would be those who rejected phone interviews. Yet others spoke in measured tones and then sent word in a roundabout way to say that they would have said things differently if they were not speaking on the phone."

I asked a high-ranking Singapore official about this climate of fear. The official seemed to have been anointed the house critic of the Singapore government, for he had frequently offered criticisms without repercussion, and in reply to my questions he characterized the attitude of Singaporeans as "Play it safe," and explained, "If you're not sure, don't do it. This syndrome breeds sycophancy. Our friends point out to us that all critics of government are not treated as generously as I am." But later, the official in effect confirmed his own observation by asking that his name not be used.

I saw several examples of this pervasive fear. On two occasions, when I met opponents of the government at hotels for lunch they pointed to people in the lobby and said they were

agents of the ISD who were watching us. (I doubted it, figuring that the Singapore government was too competent to allow its security agents to be detected so easily.) Another time, I interviewed an American in the publishing business in Singapore. He later called back, apologizing profusely, to say that he was about to buy an apartment, but first he wanted to know if I was planning to quote him as saying anything critical, because he feared that any such remark would result in his expulsion from the country. And one day, when I beeped my answering machine in Berkeley from my Singapore hotel room, I found a message giving me a phone number in Singapore to call. "Don't identify yourself in any way," the message said. "Just make an appointment to have lunch." I followed the instructions and found myself meeting an establishment journalist. All during lunch, as this journalist described repression in Singapore, he kept glancing nervously over his shoulder, as if he thought he was about to be snatched away. "I never ask questions at press conferences, because if you do they take note of you," he told me. "A number of journalists have lost their jobs." This man held such a negative view of Lee Kuan Yew that he predicted, "There will be a Nuremberg trial in Singapore if Lee loses power—I'm absolutely convinced of it. I see him in no different position from the Shah of Iran or Marcos. Each and every 'Communist' he has detained is not a Communist but an effective political opponent."

The climate of intimidation in Singapore was fueled by a series of events that began in 1987, when the government initiated a crackdown that eventually included actions against Catholic church workers, a prominent attorney who had been solicitor general of Singapore, and a diplomat at the American embassy, who was summarily expelled from the country. These actions seemed to Westerners, at least, to make little sense, because they came at a time when the government appeared to be under no threat whatsoever, from either domestic or foreign opponents; few people could imagine that the political opposition would win

more than four or five of the eighty-one seats in Parliament in the September 1988 elections, since it then held only two seats. The crackdown began in May and June of 1987, when the government arrested and detained under the International Security Act twenty-two young social activists, several of them Catholic lay workers. The alleged local ringleader was Vincent Cheng, a former seminarian who had been involved in church-related activities for more than a decade; at the time of his detention, Cheng was helping Filipino women who had been brought to Singapore as maids and then mistreated. The government contended that the twenty-two were part of a "Marxist conspiracy to subvert the existing social and political system in Singapore through Communist united-front tactics to establish a Communist state." The New York City Bar Association committee investigated these arrests, and its report charges that the detainees were subjected to prolonged sleep deprivation and extended exposure to cold, and that at least seven suffered physical abuse in the form of blows and slaps. By the end of 1987, Singapore's television viewers had been treated to their videotaped confessions, which the Bar Association contends were heavily edited, and all but Vincent Cheng had been freed. The terms of their release included a provision that they would not associate with one another in the future. When a British lawyer active in defending Singapore dissidents took some of them to a restaurant, the Bar Association report states, each had to sit at a separate table, and he rotated among them.

In April 1988, nine of the original detainees released a public statement describing their mistreatment in prison and declaring that they had been advocating more democracy and freedom, not a Communist state. Eight of the signers of that statement were rearrested the same day; the ninth was out of the country. The government, which loves to pounce on its victims with the claws of convoluted logic, said that it made these arrests because the former detainees were now claiming innocence, and there-

fore they hadn't been properly rehabilitated and might still be a danger to the state. This time, the government also put Patrick Seong, one of the lawyers for the detainees, in jail for a month; Seong had been handling his first case outside his usual field, commercial litigation, having agreed to represent several of the defendants because they couldn't find an experienced lawyer willing to take the risk. Seven of the eight who were rearrested quickly agreed to repudiate their public statement, and they signed the equivalent of affidavits reaffirming the truth of their previous confessions. According to the Bar Association's report, the affidavits meant that they would be in criminal jeopardy if they ever tried to issue a contrary statement in the future. But the eighth, a lawyer named Teo Soh Lung, who had founded a legal-aid group for criminal defendants, refused. Instead, she filed a writ of habeas corpus, and for her rebellion she had to stay in jail two more years. Teo and Vincent Cheng were finally released in June 1990.

Cheng, rehabilitated, now works in Singapore as a foot reflexologist; foot massage, many Singaporeans believe, promotes healing and relieves stress. I wanted to interview Cheng but found that there was a Catch-22. A vaguely worded clause in his release agreement indicated that he would have to get permission from the Internal Security Department for any interview. But the mere act of applying to the ISD could mean that he hadn't been sufficiently rehabilitated, since he still wanted to talk about the past. Consequently, he could be sent back to jail.

Instead, I set about trying to see a videotape of Cheng's confession, which had been televised by the Singapore Broadcasting Corporation in 1987. The response I got to this request illustrated the observation about Singapore's climate of fear. An SBC producer informed me that permission would have to come from the prime minister's press secretary; the press secretary, however, said that he would have to take it to the permanent secretary of the Ministry of Information and the Arts, the

agency's highest-ranking civil servant. Finally, permission was granted, and one journalist told me privately that he was certain Lee Kuan Yew himself had actually made the decision. Several days later, I sat in a room of the SBC building witnessing an astonishing event. On the tape, four journalists, including a Malay and an Indian, asked Cheng a series of questions about Marxist connections. Although they had pens and notebooks, and the camera switched to them frequently, I never saw any of them taking a note. The sound quality and the picture sequence constantly changed, as if pieces of tape had been spliced, and at one point Cheng's voice wasn't synchronized with his lips. Cheng, thin and frail-looking and soft-spoken, readily confessed to a series of connections with various leftist groups. Some of his answers sounded ludicrously stilted. At one point, he said, "My leftist thinking always left me biased against multinationals. What I didn't understand was whether Singapore can exist without multinationals' contributing to our economy. . . . During my detention, I was given the opportunity to understand Singapore better. I realized I needed to be more positive, to contribute to Singapore." At another point, he noted, "I realize it is very important I take into account the reality of Singapore—Singapore's vulnerability, for example." A friend of Cheng's told me later, "The only way he could protest against this forced interview was to comb his hair in the opposite direction, as a sign it wasn't him."

After seeing the tape, I interviewed a man who, years before Cheng, had also had to make a confession on television about his leftist connections. I mentioned the eerie feeling I'd had in watching Cheng's confession—the feeling that I could just as easily have been in Berlin in 1938, or in Moscow in 1952. The man, who had agreed to the interview on the condition that I not identify him, bridled. "The public confession is very Chinese," he said. "Not to get at the offender but to give a lesson to the audience. It would be a grave insult to Singaporeans

if you took the form of these detentions and confessions and simplistically looked at it in your own cultural context. Then it becomes almost Nazi-like behavior; you lump it with North Korea. But when you live here, you realize that Singapore is authoritarian but not by any means totalitarian. The idea is to humiliate people. It's the act of humiliation, not the content of the confession, that is important, to serve as a warning to others."

Cheng and the other social activists were not the only victims of the 1987–88 crackdown. Another was Francis Seow, who ended up in the United States, his career in Singapore shattered. Seow had been a close associate of Lee, serving as solicitor general from 1969 to 1972, and, starting in 1985, as the president of the Law Society, Singapore's equivalent of the American Bar Association. Under Seow's leadership, the Law Society assumed an increasingly independent role, commenting on proposed legislation—a function that the government then outlawed, in 1986. Early in 1988, Seow broke with the government and planned to run for Parliament as an opposition candidate. In May of that year, however, he appeared in court to represent Teo Soh Lung, the one dissident who wouldn't bow to the government, and Patrick Seong, the lawyer for the eight dissidents who himself had been arrested. Hours after his court appearance, Seow was arrested, charged with being in "close contact" with an American embassy diplomat, the political officer E. Mason Hendrickson. Singapore's government expelled Hendrickson from the country, alleging that he had been meeting with antigovernment lawyers "to manipulate and instigate Singaporeans, in order to bring about a particular political outcome." (Seow says that his first meeting with Hendrickson was actually to arrange a cocktail party for visiting American judges.) The government released Seow after seventy-two days, in time for him to run for Parliament but not to organize a broad opposition movement. In the September elections, the PAP took all but one seat, the sole elected opposition member being a lawyer

named Chiam See Tong. Seow, however, finished high enough to win a "nonconstituency seat"—a special seat with limited voting rights. (To make sure that Parliament had the window dressing of at least a token opposition, the government had created these special seats for opposition candidates who came closest to winning. They would be doled out as necessary to bring the number of opposition members to three.) The government then delayed the opening of Parliament for five months, saying that its building needed renovation. By the time Parliament finally opened, Seow, who was in the United States for treatment of a heart problem, had been convicted in absentia for tax evasion and fined an amount sufficient to bar him under the law from taking his seat.

"The moment I stepped back into Singapore, I would probably be getting off the plane and into prison," Seow told me from his current home, in Cambridge, Massachusetts. "Lee Kuan Yew is extremely clever. I was definitely a political prisoner; the attention of human rights groups all over the world could be riveted on my case. But if he could shift it onto the criminal plane, tax evasion, he could say that it had nothing to do with human rights. They say I evaded paying my taxes, in that I submitted a false return. That is completely untrue."

The Singapore government, which doesn't worry about bad public relations as a result of its treatment of dissidents, hired private detectives to follow Seow in the United States for seven weeks, beginning in December 1988. The *Straits Times* dutifully reported that Seow "travelled to Bloomington, Indiana, and stayed there over Christmas," and went on, "His stay there was confirmed by purchases of liquor, paid for with his American Express Gold Card. Seow moved on to Seattle on the West Coast of the U.S., five hours by air from Indiana. He was spotted at a house there and photographed sightseeing with 'an unknown Asian lady' in downtown Seattle." While no direct connection was ever proved, the month after Seow's arrest the *Asian Wall*

Street Journal reported that the Banque National de Paris had abruptly canceled a $347,000 line of credit to a Malaysian businesswoman in Singapore whom Seow had been engaged to. Ashleigh Seow, Francis Seow's son and the secretary of one of Singapore's town councils, told me that the woman, a permanent resident of Singapore, was given two weeks to leave the country and never told the reason. "I was there when they served the documents on her," he said.

As for the Hendrickson expulsion, Singapore's government directed a torrent of abuse at the United States in announcing it. Reminiscent of the old *Pravda*, the *Straits Times* reported, on May 11, 1988, the number of demonstrators at a protest rally before the rally had taken place. "More than 4,000 unionists and workers are staging a protest rally today to show their anger at American interference in Singapore's domestic policies," said the paper, which comes out before dawn. On May 31, Goh Chok Tong, who was then deputy prime minister, told Parliament that "the American Constitution—and here I am quoting one Dr. Freeman Dyson—'The American Constitution is designed to be operated by crooks, just as the British constitution is designed to be operated by gentlemen.' " Britain's *Financial Times* wrote of the controversy,

> The fracas between tiny Singapore and the mighty U.S. looks set to go down as one of the more improbable, even bizarre, diplomatic clashes. . . . All this is directed against a country which absorbs a quarter of Singapore's total exports, provides about a third of its foreign investment and whose companies are among the biggest private-sector employers on the island. In addition, it is a country whose defence role in the region Singapore strongly supports.

Did the Singapore government lose all sense of reality in 1987 and 1988, finding itself so embarrassed by bad publicity over the arrest of the twenty-two activists that it kept digging a deeper

hole for itself in an effort to get out? I asked Lee Kuan Yew about these events, and about why he appeared in general so contemptuous of the concept of human rights. Lee's answers seem rooted in an era when many countries saw a monolithic Communist conspiracy poised to take over at any sign of weakness, but his words were delivered with such passion and such determination that they also began to resemble something else: to me they sounded for all the world like a father talking about protecting the chastity of his daughter. The only problem, of course, is that in this instance the daughter has by now turned thirty-two.

"We did not arrest them because they were church people," Lee began. "We have a professional organization called the Internal Security Department. Its job is to make sure that the subversion of the Communist Party of Malaya does not swing into the English-educated world. This particular man, Vincent Cheng, tried to use the church as his cover." The activists, Lee said, were trying to create unrest, which was a necessary precursor to the second stage, bombings and assassinations. "It makes no sense otherwise," he continued. "Because, first of all, they were no threat to us, right? None of the twenty-two were any threat to us politically. They were not known public figures. They couldn't have beaten us in any election. You do this, you're bound to have a public reaction which must be adverse, because it comes out of the blue. So why do you want to undertake something with adverse electoral consequences a year before the elections, when these people were no threat to us in the coming elections? Ask yourself that. The Western press spoke as if we were in danger of losing our seats and our majority. But we knew we were in no danger at all, either before or after the action. I told the younger ministers, 'Look, as I see it, this takes about five years before it gets going. You can wait for it to mature and you might find out the ramifications. But you'll run the risk of many more innocent people being drawn in.' "

I also asked Lee about Chia Thye Poh—how a man so modest and considerate could be seen as a threat. As I described Chia's qualities, Lee interrupted, saying, "Chinese Communist style. That is the ideal Communist. You must be humble, you must be very frugal and Spartan, not flashy, not trying to awe or impress people. They impress people by their humility and self-sacrificing manner, a certain exaggerated understatement of themselves, but a steely determination."

While many leaders around the world violate human rights, few won't at least pay lip service to them in interviews with Western correspondents. Paying lip service, however, is not Lee Kuan Yew's style. "I'm not sure human rights are a traditional value, even in Christian societies," he told me. "It's the answer of the West in countering Communism. Democracy countered Communism by sponsoring what has been advanced as the axiomatic truths of free society, which includes freedom of the press and human rights. But are they universal values? Can you prove their universality? If they are in fact of universal relevance, will they not win just by a process of Darwinian evolution?"

Even as Lee Kuan Yew continues to fear a Communist conspiracy, the tattered remains of Asian Communist parties are looking to Singapore as a model of how to maintain tight control over a nation's government and over its people's lives while simultaneously quelling discontent by freeing its economy. Academicians in China have named the movement "neo-authoritarianism"—a system that allows the leaders to keep their party firmly in power yet preside over a booming economy. In his study of Singapore, Russell Heng, the Singaporean researcher, speculates that neo-authoritarianism could emerge as the next ideological challenge to democratic capitalism. The leaders of Vietnam are already speaking openly of their admiration for Singapore, but their ardor might cool when they discover that

a major component of Singapore's success is the absence of corruption.

In Singapore, the People's Action Party serves as the basic vehicle for control. Formed in 1954, at a time when Lee Kuan Yew was in alliance with local Communists, the PAP still bears a striking resemblance to Communist parties in its structure. Lee no doubt saw that Communist parties were organized to promote tight discipline and control, two qualities he values, and he has never hesitated to borrow attractive ideas no matter what their source. Accordingly, the PAP's members have no role in choosing the Party leaders or the candidates for Parliament. Instead, Lee screens the members carefully and selects from them several hundred "cadres"—their exact number and their names are secret. The cadres, in turn, elect a twelve-member central Executive Committee. "In the past," the *Far Eastern Economic Review* reported in 1990, "Lee has unapologetically compared the system to that of the Roman Catholic Church, where 'the Pope appoints the cardinals and the cardinals then elect the Pope.' Others have described the cadre-based system as 'Leninist.' Ironically, it was actually imposed on the party by Lee in 1957 against the strenuous objections of the party's left, on the grounds that it would provide an iron curtain to prevent the PAP from being infiltrated by Communists." In remaining secretary-general of the PAP after giving up the prime ministership to Goh Chok Tong, Lee still holds the ultimate reins of power. "Goh is perhaps the only head of state in the world who doesn't control his political party," a European diplomat in Singapore noted recently.

Singapore has the trappings of a democracy: its people elect a Parliament, and opposition candidates are free to contest any seat. It is even possible that if the PAP imposed disastrous policies on Singapore—and at the same time chose not to tamper with the electoral system—the opposition could win control. But the opposition has a long way to go. From 1966, when the

Barisan Sosialis delegates walked out, until 1981, when Joshua Benjamin Jeyaretnam won a seat for the Workers' Party, Parliament did not have a single opposition member, and in the 1980s there were never more than two full-voting opposition members. The most recent election took place in August 1991, and although the opposition parties did better than at any time since 1963, the PAP still retained all but four of the eighty-one seats.

Jeyaretnam, who was born in Sri Lanka, is the only opposition figure in Singapore with almost as forceful a presence as Lee himself. Like Lee, he trained for the law in Britain, and his command of the Queen's English is impeccable. When I called on Jeyaretnam in his office, a cramped space he shares with a secretary, and he spoke about what he believes are the injustices in Singapore's society, his powerful voice resounded mightily. Although Jeyaretnam was the lone representative of the opposition in Parliament, the government launched an extraordinary series of actions against him. "Until I got elected in 1981, the PAP was paying lip service to some kind of opposition in Parliament," Jeyaretnam told me. "The moment I got into Parliament, the members were completely stunned, though this was the sixth election in which I had contested a seat. Often, when I asked a question in Parliament, they said I was abusing my privileges. I had to go before the Committee on Privileges four times, accused of making improper allegations against the government. Outside Parliament, the PAP began a systematic campaign to isolate me."

In 1984, Jeyaretnam was accused by the government of misusing Workers' Party funds, and the case went to trial. He was acquitted on three counts and fined a thousand Singapore dollars on a fourth. Under the law, it would have taken a fine of twice that amount to deprive him of his seat in Parliament. Seven months later, the judge who presided over his case was transferred out of the courts and into the Attorney General's office. The government then appealed the case, and in 1986 the appeals court fined Jeyaretnam the necessary $2,000, disbarred him, and

sentenced him to a month in jail. Jeyaretnam had the right to appeal his disbarment, although not the conviction itself, to the Privy Council in England, the highest court in the Commonwealth, and he did so. In 1988, the Privy Council delivered a sharply worded verdict restoring Jeyaretnam to the practice of law. The Privy Council Law Lords declared that Jeyaretnam and a codefendant from the Workers' Party "have suffered a grievous injustice," and went on, "They have been fined, imprisoned, and publicly disgraced for offenses of which they were not guilty." The Singapore government then abolished the right of appeal to the Privy Council in such cases. But this still wasn't the end of the story. Lee sued Jeyaretnam for libel and, in 1990, won vast damages, which forced Jeyaretnam to put his house up for sale. "Lee won't let you go," Jeyaretnam told me. "He said several times in Parliament that I had to be destroyed."

While not every opponent gets the attention accorded to Jeyaretnam, his experience does illustrate the perils of being in the political opposition in Singapore. On a subtler level, political opponents face a number of potential obstacles. Even when the government does nothing, opposition candidates can experience substantial setbacks to their careers; for instance, many Singaporeans are unlikely to relish the idea of being represented in court by a lawyer identified with the opposition. "Whether you're a lawyer or an architect or a businessman, your clients want you to get things done," one Singapore professional told me. "A few remarks from the government, and they'll go away. We have a very cautious public, having grown up in these conditions." Opposition candidates have complained about restrictions on their rallies, and about distortion of their views in the government-controlled press. Because trade unions and universities are dominated by the government, they're unlikely to serve as fertile breeding grounds for opposition parties.

In part because of gerrymandering, the percentage of seats in Parliament won by the opposition bears no relation to the

percentage of votes it gets. In the August 1991 election, for instance, the opposition parties took almost 40 percent of the vote but won only four of the eighty-one seats. "The PAP has succeeded in preventing this opposition vote from translating into a comparable percentage of seats in Parliament through such techniques as . . . changing the constitutional ground rules at will and combining constituencies and redrawing electoral boundaries for the benefit of the ruling party," the New York City Bar Association report stated. "Following the 1988 general elections, the government imposed percentage limitations on the number of minorities who can live in particular housing complexes. . . . The Singapore government has started to impose quotas on each apartment block and on each neighborhood."

Thus, Singapore is effectively a one-party state, with the ruling party organized on the cadre system. The government has weakened religious institutions, dominated the press, and introduced pervasive censorship. It owns many major businesses and controls the one big labor union. If this has a familiar ring, it is because these conditions—despite the fervent anti-Communism of Lee Kuan Yew—are indistinguishable from those normally identified with a Communist state. Universal employment, good housing for everyone, and the absence of poverty are also part of the Communist rhetoric, the only difference being that in Singapore they have become reality. The analogy can obviously be carried too far—no Communist nation until recent years would have turned to multinational corporations for investment capital, for example. But it raises a fascinating question: Did Communism die because of its inherent deficiencies or because its governments were too corrupt and too incompetent—because there were no Lee Kuan Yews?

Hidden away on the third floor of the Tanglin Shopping Center, in the Orchard Road tourist area, is a little store called D & O

Film & Video. Here, Albert Odell holds court, to talk about movies the way a football fan might talk about the greatest Super Bowls. Odell, once British and now a Singaporean, came from Hong Kong in 1948 to represent film companies that wanted to distribute their movies in Southeast Asia. Today, he runs his video store in conjunction with a silent partner—the government's Board of Film Censors, which has the first crack at all videotapes that enter Singapore legally. "I get a parcel every week, but it's delivered directly to the censors," he told me. "I open it in their presence. The censors have a yardstick to go by: certain words are one hundred percent taboo. They allow 'fuck' but never 'motherfucker.' If 'mother' is involved, it goes. Any frontal bare breast is out, but a side view is O.K. All references to Allah go. In *Young Guns*, a guy might be shot twelve times, and they'll say, 'Reduce it so he's shot only five times.' " Singapore's officials are nothing if not methodical, and they duly type up on a sheet of paper every excision and alteration they require in a film. ("Reduce to minimum the sequence of couple embracing passionately and woman in ecstasy," one alteration reads.) Odell tapes the relevant sheet to the inside of each videocassette box, so the customer can know exactly what is missing. Browsing through the shelves of D & O Film & Video becomes an exercise in R-rated hilarity.

Singapore imposes censorship not only on movies but also on books, magazines, and music. The United States Information Service can't show a film on America before submitting it to the censors. Old Beatles favorites such as "Yellow Submarine" are forbidden, and so are some of the albums by the Rolling Stones, Eric Clapton, and Elton John, often because song lyrics contain references to drugs. All jukeboxes were banned, as a symbol of moral decay, until July 1991, when the government relented and licensed one for the Hotel Asia. Censorship can be the result of whim as well as of policy. I was so curious about the banning of *Cosmopolitan* that I put the question to Lee. "I agree with you,"

he answered, "*Cosmopolitan* is not likely to degrade or beguile young minds. But I have in my midst ministers younger than I who are fervent Christians, who believe that their daughters should not be reading all this. And one of them was in charge of information and the press, and he decided to ban *Cosmopolitan*." In this communications hub of southern Asia, Cable News Network can be seen only when the Singapore Broadcasting Corporation chooses to broadcast CNN news, because satellite-reception dishes are illegal. "You can get CNN in Saigon, you can get it in Beijing, but you can't get it here," one diplomat complains. When the American embassy applied for a satellite dish, in the mid-1980s, it took the Singapore government two years to grant the application, and then only on the proviso that no Singaporeans—not even employees of the embassy—be allowed to look at programs from it. The embassy is also forbidden to invite Singaporeans to watch American election returns on television.

The government is most careful to keep out anything that might offend Muslims. Because of the tensions between Malay Muslims and the Chinese during the time of the Malaysian Federation, and because Indonesia, a mostly Muslim country, slaughtered tens of thousands of its Chinese minority in 1965, Singapore bends over backward to avoid inciting either its own Malay population or its Muslim neighbors. (In 1965, Lee Kuan Yew said of Indonesia, "They live in a tenement area and they want to come into my little suburban house with its fruit trees.") Until recently, every Malay Singaporean going to college had his full tuition paid by the government, no matter how wealthy his family was; there was no such policy for Chinese or Indians. Several government officials I talked with deplored the fact that Malays don't take as instinctively as Chinese to the pursuit of money, because the result is a Malay underclass in Singapore that, it is feared, could explode at any provocation. "A children's book published in India about the founder of the Sikh religion

was banned because he had criticized Islam," a bookseller told me. "We had an art book of Persian miniatures, and one was a picture of Muhammad as a young prince. I had to ink out the face, because Muhammad isn't supposed to be depicted. I got a book on geometric designs in Islamic mosques, and even that had to be submitted to the censors." The government's fear of its Malay minority may be tinged with paranoia. Although Singaporean Malays on average earn less than the Chinese, most still have a substantial stake in the system and have come to be far better off than their counterparts in Malaysia. A young Malay guide from the Singapore Tourist Promotion Board, who showed me the sights of Singapore, told me the story of her family. In the early 1970s, the family of ten lived in a squatters' zinc-roofed, one-room hut, without even a toilet. The roof leaked, she said, and also made the room an oven during the day. Now they reside in a four-bedroom apartment. All her sisters and brothers have good professional jobs, and two of her brothers, who are married, live in five-room apartments.

The workings of censorship can be subtle. The regulations call for all books to be submitted to the censor, but because this procedure can take months for each title, the booksellers generally engage in self-censorship, ordering only books that they know are safe, and not bothering to submit them. "A couple of years ago, some young people started an arts magazine," a man active in the arts community told me. "No bookstore would sell it, and it died." In 1986, a critical biography of Lee Kuan Yew was published in Australia. Called *No Man Is an Island*, it was written by James Minchin, an Anglican priest who had worked in Singapore. The censors didn't ban the book; they rejected it because the cover carried aerial views of Singapore labeled "Courtesy of Ministry of Communications and Information." That, the censors said, implied government endorsement of the book. The 1990 edition of the book dropped the photos, but no bookseller has dared offer it anyway, since a bookseller

as well as a book's author and publisher can be subject to a libel suit by Lee. The same holds true for a second critical biography of Lee, written by T. S. Selvan and called *Singapore: The Ultimate Island*, which was published in Australia in 1990. I bought both books in Johore Bahru, the Malaysian city across the causeway from Singapore, where merchants do a booming business in banned books and uncensored videotapes. In my second interview with Lee, I took the books from my briefcase and asked him why Singaporeans couldn't be trusted to read them. It was the only time Lee lost his composure. Of *The Ultimate Island* he said, "And this one I don't even know. . . . It's just rubbish. It's not even a well-written or well-researched book. It's just rubbish. I don't even know of the book." He added, "Anybody can write anything they like about me, but they run the risk of defaming me and ending up paying me damages. That's my counterweapon."

The book industry is a paragon of freedom compared with the country's newspapers. All the newspapers are published by a company called Singapore Press Holdings, and anyone who wants to own more than 3 percent of its stock must seek approval from the minister of communications and the arts; the minister also has veto power over the directors. Government-owned companies and agencies are among the largest stockholders in Singapore Press Holdings, and its current chairman is in addition the chairman of the Port of Singapore Authority, a government agency. Anyone who reads the *Straits Times* might wonder why all this corporate control is necessary, since direct pressure from government officials is never needed. The *Straits Times* operates with a subservience that irritates even some supporters of the government. Day after day, the paper devotes much of its front page to the latest pronouncements of top officials. One day, for instance, a five-column headline over the lead story read "PM: LET'S MAKE THIS THE FINEST NATION," and the article began, "Mr. Goh Chok Tong last night issued an open invitation to all Singaporeans to help build this country into the finest in the

world by the end of this century." A Western diplomat who had previously been stationed in Beijing told me, "Reading the *Straits Times* is like reading the *People's Daily*. Basically, the government doesn't like anything it can't control."

Unlike most other countries with a controlled press, Singapore attempts to keep the foreign press in line, too. For several years, beginning in 1985, it fought a running battle with Dow Jones & Co., after taking offense at articles in two of the company's publications, the *Asian Wall Street Journal* and the *Far Eastern Economic Review*. Among other things, Lee twice initiated proceedings against the *Asian Journal* for criminal contempt of court, filed libel actions against each publication, and ordered that the Singapore circulation of each be cut back drastically. When the *Review* responded by ending all circulation in Singapore, the government licensed a local printer to publish pirated copies of the magazine, minus the advertisements, each week, for sale in Singapore. In September 1989, the *Review* wasn't allowed to send a reporter to cover its own libel trial. The next year, Lee, rejecting a request from Secretary of State James Baker, refused to let either publication cover Baker's visit to Singapore. The controversy neared resolution in 1991, however, with each side taking conciliatory steps toward settling the legal battles.

The government has also used circulation restrictions as a weapon against other foreign publications, and in 1990 it enacted harsh regulations applicable to foreign newspapers and magazines that sell copies in Singapore. "The clear intent of the Government was to warn all foreign periodicals that now circulate in Singapore to be wary of their reporting on Singapore lest they cross the vaguely drawn line of 'interfering' in Singapore's 'domestic affairs,' thereby making themselves subject to the restrictions," the State Department human rights report stated.

Never one to hide from his enemies, Lee went to Hong Kong in 1990 and addressed two international press groups; his remarks only strengthened his reputation for combativeness. He

blamed television for the deaths in Tiananmen Square, saying it was television coverage of demonstrations in the Philippines and South Korea, rather than a desire for freedom, that had spurred the Chinese students' protest. And he predicted that the Western press now centered in Hong Kong would gratefully flee to Singapore in 1997, when the crown colony reverts to Chinese sovereignty, and work under its rules. Derek Davies, the former editor of the *Far Eastern Economic Review*, wrote that Lee "had the gall to suggest that, come 1997, Singapore would offer the most congenial perch from which Western correspondents could cover Asia. He appeared to be serious. Presumably he believes that, by 1997, the entire 'foreign' press will have been bullied into the pathetic state of the media in Singapore."

Lee clearly takes delight in his battles against his critics. When I asked him how many people he had sued for libel, he replied, "I think about thirteen. Thirteen men in thirty years. Not bad. I haven't lost any of them. I fought only four in court; the others decided to settle. In other words, they withdrew and apologized and paid for my costs and paid a sum of money to charity. A political point was made." Still, the confrontations with the media raise a question: Why should a prosperous country with no government corruption to hide—a nation that seeks to be the communications hub of its region—act so forcefully against the press, against what appears to be its own best interests? The most plausible answer is that Lee Kuan Yew doesn't like what he can't control—and that he sees the independent forces in Singapore today as fueling the potential for destabilization in the future. Censorship in a nation that wants to be a major participant in the world communications revolution might appear to be a contradiction, but Lee has shown in the past that he can successfully counter a well-known adage: he can eat his cake and have it, too.

Nothing seems beyond the scope of the government's manipulation. "They recently had a campaign against obesity," a diplomat told me. "Cherubic kids are prized by Chinese society, but the Singapore government likes them lean and mean." Unlike most other offenses, being overweight is not subject to a fine, but the government did rule that obese recruits will have to undergo five months of basic military training, as opposed to three months for fit recruits. (All males have to serve at least two years in the armed forces.) Overall, however, few campaigns have raised as many hackles as a government effort to get college graduates to marry each other and breed. Government ministers don't shy away from the word "eugenics," despite its negative connotations since the Nazi era. Lee, who initiated the campaign in 1983, once pointed to statistics showing that women with little education have twice as many babies as college graduates, and told the nation in a speech, "If we continue to reproduce ourselves in this lopsided way, we will be unable to maintain present standards. . . . Our economy will falter; administration will suffer, and our society will decline."

Singapore's educational system is intensive, and pupils are subjected to pressure from an early age. One Singaporean banker I interviewed said, "Everyone has private tutors for his children, and it sometimes starts at two or three years old," and he added, "My daughter at age three and a half came home from nursery school and asked, 'Why am I not studying with a private tutor? Everyone else is doing it.' It's hard here to enjoy childhood." By the time a woman graduates from a university, being a housewife holds little appeal for her. But housewives are what many male Singaporean graduates want. Influenced by a Chinese cultural tradition that relegates wives to the home, they shy away from educated women. If present trends continue, the government estimates, two out of five female graduates will still be unmarried at age forty. Foreign men who work in Singapore find a bonanza: the city is filled with attractive, accomplished unmarried women. For the government, however, this situation is a potential crisis.

That's where the Social Development Unit, which is nothing less than an official government matchmaking service, comes in. Only college graduates are eligible; they fill out personal-data forms, and a computer then provides the names of potential partners. "In our culture, there are no singles bars, and it's hard to meet people socially," Ang Wai Hoong, the SDU's director, told me. "Girls read these lovely romantic novels, and our guys are practical-minded technocrats. So when the two get together it's a mismatch." The SDU sponsors lectures on how to date women, along with a variety of other activities, including evening cruises to nowhere that are dubbed "love boats." Then, when the matchmaking succeeds (253 SDU members were matched into matrimony in 1990), the newlyweds are bombarded with a variety of government incentives to have children. The incentives openly rely on the concepts of eugenics. If a working mother has performed at a certain level in tests given to all students in the tenth grade, for instance, she can deduct from her taxes a percentage of her income for each child; the more children she has, the higher the percentage grows. On the other side of the coin, the government instituted a so-called Sterilization Cash Incentive Scheme in 1984 but later abandoned it, along with several other eugenics-inspired schemes. Under this one, low-income families, if neither husband nor wife completed high school, could get $5,000 toward the purchase of an apartment if the wife agreed to be sterilized.

Many female graduates in Singapore, being more interested in a career than in having children, express resentment at being looked upon by their government as high-quality breeding stock. The government's social-engineering schemes have also alienated many Malays and Indians. Now that the Chinese language and Chinese culture are no longer identified with leftist politics, Lee Kuan Yew has been pushing for the adoption of Confucian values, and for the speaking of Mandarin along with English, as a counterweight to what he considers the decadence of the

West—a decadence he sees spreading in Singapore because of its economic ties. (This isn't entirely paranoia. At one of the more popular McDonald's, for example, large groups of Chinese and Malays in their twenties, financed by indulgent parents, sit at outdoor tables all night long, talking and smoking pack after pack of cigarettes. Cigarettes have become a form of protest for rebellious young people, since smoking is the one activity the government tries to stamp out that nevertheless remains legal.) Lee told me that he was encouraging Confucianism "to insure that certain basic core values which held a society together are not lost." Confucianism is also a philosophy that is ideally suited to Singapore, since it teaches absolute obedience to the state and its rulers. But Malays and Indians look upon Confucianism, and upon the periodic campaigns urging the speaking of Mandarin, as dangerous moves that could force them out of the mainstream of Singaporean society. Not all Chinese favor these things, either. "Children are taking their cultural cues from the U.S., but only at a superficial level, like Michael Jackson and Ninja Turtles," a wealthy Chinese industrialist told me. "My children wouldn't speak a word of Mandarin unless someone forced them. We don't want to become like ABCs—American-born Chinese. But will Mandarin be increasingly required for the civil service and business? With the population three-quarters Chinese, the minorities feel justifiably threatened."

When the government uses its authoritarian powers for mainstream causes, like environmental improvement, the results would make any planner in the West envious. Singapore, like many cities around the world, has been threatened with slow strangulation by the increased use of cars. But unlike the other cities, the government of Singapore can dictate stringent restrictions on car ownership and get away with it. Because of government taxes, the same models of cars cost two or three times as much as in the United States. (The cost drops substantially if you agree to use the car only at night and on weekends.) There

is a quota on the number of new cars allowed, and the government holds a monthly auction of rights to buy these cars. The annual road tax ranges from a few hundred dollars to well over a thousand, depending on the size of the car. The owner pays extra for the right to drive into the central business district during rush hours, and soon sensors will be embedded in the roads so that the owner can be billed for other rush-hour driving, such as driving on freeways. Combined with excellent public transportation, the result is clean air and few traffic jams.

Even in the earliest days of Singapore's development, Lee insisted on environmental controls for industry. When I asked him what he considered the biggest mistakes he had made as prime minister, he didn't mention the collapse of the Malaysian Federation first. Instead, he told me about "a beautiful patch of green right in the middle of our harbor called Keppel, which had a golf course," and he went on, "But we were so desperate to get our industrialization going that I was persuaded by my colleague the minister for finance to allow a Japanese company to set up an oil refinery there. It was a fire hazard and a blight on the landscape. And now they've sold out, because they lost money."

High government officials in Singapore not only get salaries commensurate with those of corporation executives but also occupy offices luxurious enough to resemble the finest corporate suites. Even by that standard, the office of the minister of trade and industry is something special: it is huge, with tasteful high-tech decor, and is situated on the top floor of the Treasury Building, with a commanding view of the harbor. Its occupant is Lee Hsien Loong, who is often known as B. G. Lee, because he held the rank of brigadier general when he left the army, at age thirty-one. Besides being the minister of trade and industry,

B. G. Lee, at forty, is deputy prime minister and the heir apparent to Goh Chok Tong. He is also the son of Lee Kuan Yew.

B. G. Lee dismisses the relationship as unimportant. "After a while, they're not interested in who your father is but in what you're doing," he told me. Lee Kuan Yew hasn't got off so easily: his critics frequently question why the son of the prime minister rose so rapidly in what is supposed to be a meritocracy. After meeting B. G. Lee, however, it becomes impossible to attribute his status merely to nepotism. A graduate of Cambridge and Harvard, fluent in Mandarin and Bahasa Malaysia—the language of Malaysia—and formidable in his native English, he is a powerful intellect and a master of words; every off-the-cuff remark he makes is phrased as if a speechwriter had taken days to polish it. Unlike his father, he wears a suit and is smooth in manner, betraying none of his emotions in his face. During my interview, he laughed heartily after every answer. Although in Asia laughter is often a sign of being ill at ease, he appeared so supremely confident that I began to wonder whether he was instead laughing with pleasure at the brilliance of his response.

Like his father, Lee Hsien Loong takes a hard line toward the governing of Singapore. He sees no need for a relaxation of censorship. "If we took a poll of the population, there would not be a dramatic change in censorship standards," he said. "Do we want to have Washington, D.C.,'s Thirteenth Street in Singapore? Most Singaporeans would say no." (Few Singaporeans are as worldly as their deputy prime minister, so in reality a reference to Washington's center of sleaze would draw only a blank stare.) Nor does he feel that the foreign press should report on Singapore as it sees fit. "We start with the proposition that Singaporeans have to be masters of their own households, and foreigners are guests," he said. "Does it hurt us? Banks grow at the rate of 15 percent a year, multinationals come in. I don't think it hurts our reputation to have taken on Dow Jones and

not to have been bested by them." On the question of demonstrations—even relatively innocuous ones, such as those by students protesting tuition increases—Lee was firm. "It would be a sad thing if we had to solve our problems this way," he said. "I don't think a demonstration in this part of the world would be like a campout on the Mall in Washington. Our answer is this: We fully concede we're not like America."

Also like his father, Lee can be tough. When he came to Washington in 1989 to speak to the Asia Society, a business group, he used the occasion to attack America's human rights policy, saying that the United States should continue to defend Southeast Asia but should keep out of its internal affairs. He said that it "puzzles us that U.S. human rights groups and government officials should so confidently prescribe for us, as a panacea for progress and stability, U.S.-style press freedoms and 'human rights.' Can the Singapore government really be so benighted and wrongheaded as not to see what is so patently in Singapore's interests? . . . Speaking English does not make us an Anglo-Saxon people, much less make us Americans. . . . We are not a Western society, and have never sought to become one." When I remarked to Lee that it must have taken courage to make such a speech in Washington, he replied, "The audience wasn't hostile. Businesspeople don't mind having liberals shot at."

The contrast between B. G. Lee and Goh Chok Tong is dramatic. Goh's father died when he was ten, and the family survived on his mother's earnings as a schoolteacher. He grew up speaking the Fukien dialect at home, and although he got a master's degree in economics at Williams College, his English is no better than adequate, and on occasion it is difficult for a Westerner to follow, because it has a Singaporean lilt. A friend's father "was amazed that I should choose to make a living as a politician," Goh once said, adding, "Fortunately, this is Singapore, and our people place greater value on substance and results

than on the gift of gab." Goh—who, like Lee Kuan Yew, often dresses informally—is tall and thin, sits ramrod straight, and was visibly nervous during my interview. Especially in contrast to the self-assurance of the two Lees, Goh's awkwardness makes him seem refreshingly human, and Singaporeans appear to be fond of him. But Goh, too, can be tough. He played a major role in the arrest of the church workers and in the battle with Dow Jones, and in 1990 he told a public gathering, "If people behave in a manner that will threaten the wider interests of Singapore, they will feel the firm smack of the government."

Few people would envy Goh his position. On one side is Lee Kuan Yew, who heads the PAP, takes an active role in running the government, and, in 1988, told Singaporeans, "Even from my sickbed, even if you are going to lower me into the grave, and I feel that something is going wrong, I'll get up." On the other side is Lee Hsien Loong, who openly aspires to Goh's position. "If I can do the job, I want to be prime minister someday," he told me. I asked Goh how he survived, sandwiched between two such forceful personalities, one of whom threatens to come back from the grave if necessary. "Well, I think that's because I'm relaxed," he replied. "I'm not wearing Lee Kuan Yew's shoes. I'm wearing my own shoes, which are much smaller than his. I think that B. G. Lee is in many ways like his father. But he knows that to govern Singapore you want a team that can work for Singapore. So he's very supportive as No. 2." Goh calls Lee Hsien Loong "an obvious successor." (The succession became less certain in November 1992, when Lee Hsien Loong began chemotherapy treatments for malignant lymphoma, which is cancer of the infection-fighting lymphatic system.)

Goh became prime minister in November 1990, offering the prospect of a changed Singapore. With the release of Vincent Cheng and Teo Soh Lung a few months before, Singapore was down to its last political prisoner, Chia Thye Poh, and he is now a part-time prisoner at that. Goh has filled his speeches with

references to making Singapore a more enjoyable, less restrictive place to live and has pledged that the government will move toward a less paternalistic role. He has told Parliament that "the society which we want to bring about will be more refined, more compassionate, kinder and gentler, to borrow President Bush's words," and added that "there will be greater freedom for Singaporeans to make their own choices and to express themselves." Then, in August 1991, he called a snap parliamentary election for the final day of the month—two years earlier than was required by law. Goh said that he was making the election a test of his plans for liberalization, and that if he didn't get sufficient support "we can all go back to authoritarian government." For once, Singapore's opposition, so often cowed and ineffective, came up with a brilliant strategy. Its architect was Chiam See Tong, the only full-voting opposition member of Parliament and the leader of the Singapore Democratic Party, which, along with the Workers' Party, forms the bulk of the opposition; the two parties hold similar views and stand to the left of the PAP. Chiam won his first election to Parliament in 1984; he told me that Lee Kuan Yew had campaigned against him then by pointing out that Chiam's opponent had got better test scores in high school. Chiam, a lawyer who is extremely meek and mild in manner, persuaded the Workers' Party to allow PAP candidates to remain unopposed for forty-one of Parliament's seats, and so guarantee that, no matter what the size of the opposition vote, the PAP would remain in power. Chiam sensed the mood of the electorate perfectly. Clearly, there was widespread dissatisfaction with the government's authoritarian, paternalistic policies, but many more voters would be tempted to express that dissatisfaction if they could be absolutely certain that they wouldn't be throwing the PAP out of office, and thereby imperiling the economic prosperity they hold so dear. The result was that the PAP lost ground, its share of the vote dropping to 61 percent from 63 percent in 1988. The drop translated into only four seats, but it

was still the opposition's biggest victory since 1963. And it put Lee and Goh in a real bind: Goh had wanted the vote to be a referendum on his plans for liberalization, but Chiam had turned it into the opposite. Many of those who voted against the PAP were asking for more liberalization, not less.

What will happen now is far from clear. Goh said after the election that "life cannot go on as before," but he gave no hint of what he meant. Some students of the Singapore political scene speculated that Lee Kuan Yew would push Goh aside in favor of Lee Hsien Loong, who might quickly turn a kinder, gentler Singapore into a tougher, more brutal Singapore. Singaporean journalists I spoke with noted that the business community was trying to persuade Lee Kuan Yew that it didn't want a crackdown against the opposition—possibly the one move that could bring about the instability that Lee so fears.

If the hard-liners win out, can Singapore continue to survive as an anachronism—an economic power aligned with the West but resisting the democracy and freedom sweeping through the world? The tendency would be to answer no. The only problem with such an assessment is that when it comes to Singapore, the doomsayers have yet to score a point. Lee Kuan Yew has proved them wrong on every possible occasion over the past twenty-five years.

The problem is the same for the other scenario, that of liberalization. Goh has done little more in his first year of office than to ease somewhat the censorship of movies. Jeyaretnam, the Workers' Party head, remarked that "nothing has changed in this administration except that men can now go see films in which women show their bodies." Goh's promises of greater freedom have been expressed only in generalities, and when I interviewed him I tried to press him on the particulars. I asked if he could name any issues on which he and Lee Kuan Yew disagreed. "Issues, no," he replied. "But maybe the style, the way of doing things." We discussed the rules and the fines for

breaking them that are posted all over Singapore. "My own goal is for us to move into a position one day where we don't need to have all those fines put up," Goh said. "The rules would be there, but they would not be intruding into your consciousness every day. That means a newer generation must be put through schools, to be socially educated that this is the norm of behavior. I think it would require twenty or twenty-five years before we can move to that situation."

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The Forgotten Country