



Post-War Singapore: 1945-1959

The road to self-government

Japan's Surrender

- 17 Aug 1945: Japanese officials in Singapore announced emperor's decision to end the war
- 3 weeks of 'Whispering Terror' began where resistance groups held their own trials and executed collaborators
- 5 Sep 1945: Commonwealth troops landed to a loud welcome
- 12 Sep 1945: General Itagaki signs official surrender to Lord Mountbatten at City Hall





What would be
on the people's
minds at this
point?

Place yourself into the shoes of
someone who survived the Japanese
Occupation – what emotions would
you be feeling and why?



Inquiry Questions

Key inquiry question from textbook: **What aspirations did the people have for Singapore after 1945?**

- Supporting question 1: **What was their lived experience immediately after 1945?**
- Supporting question 2: **How did their experiences shape the people's sentiments towards British rule?**
- Supporting question 3: **Who were the key individuals or groups who led efforts to realise those aspirations?**

Chapter Overview

1. British Military Administration
2. Problems of Post-war Singapore
3. Rise of Local Activism
4. Malayan Emergency
5. Birth of Political Parties
6. The 1955 Elections
7. Labour Front Government and Merdeka Talks
8. The 1959 Elections and PAP Government



The British Military Administration (BMA)

Not to be confused with BMI

What is the BMA?

- An interim government where the military assumed full judicial, legislative, executive and administrative powers
- Lasted from 5 Sep 1945 to 31 March 1946
- Headed by Major General Hone

What does it mean for the military to assume all these powers?



Military Administration vs Civilian Government

Civilian Government

- Mostly run by civil servants
- Separation of executive, judicial, legislative powers
- Civil rights and freedoms available for the population
- Government response and policy involves an extended period for due process and parliamentary debate

Military Administration

- Mostly run by military staff officers
- Military decides laws, executes laws, and prosecutes laws
- Civil rights and freedoms curtailed for public order and security
- Military's power and authority enables swift action without the need for debate

Any potential issues?

Singapore after the Occupation


- The BMA did not inherit an easy task
- Infrastructure of most utilities such as electricity, water, gas and telephone services were in disrepair
- Food and medical supplies were dangerously low
- Harbour facilities damaged and numerous shipwrecks blocked the harbour



The BMA's Time in Singapore

- Infamous and remembered for their failings
- Colloquially known as the 'Black Market Administration'
- British military behaved as if they were in conquered enemy territory
- BMA officers granted favours to local businessmen or black-market dealers in exchange for kickbacks
- An audit report revealed losses of over \$15 million from corruption





In the six months of military government, the BMA struggled manfully with the daunting task of stabilising and resuscitating Singapore and Malaya. There were notable successes. Famine was averted... Mobile dispensaries were organised to treat thousands of malaria cases... Local police were stiffened by combat troops... bringing a drop in crime figures by March 1946.


...

Despite improving rice yields, food shortages were a constant feature under the BMA... The BMA's policy... opened the way for misallocation and black market corruption. This also applied to the import of medical opium, which soon exploded into a considerable illegal drug trade... British authority suffered an immense blow from its association with these criminal activities especially at a time of great civilian deprivation.

How to Win a War and Lose the Peace

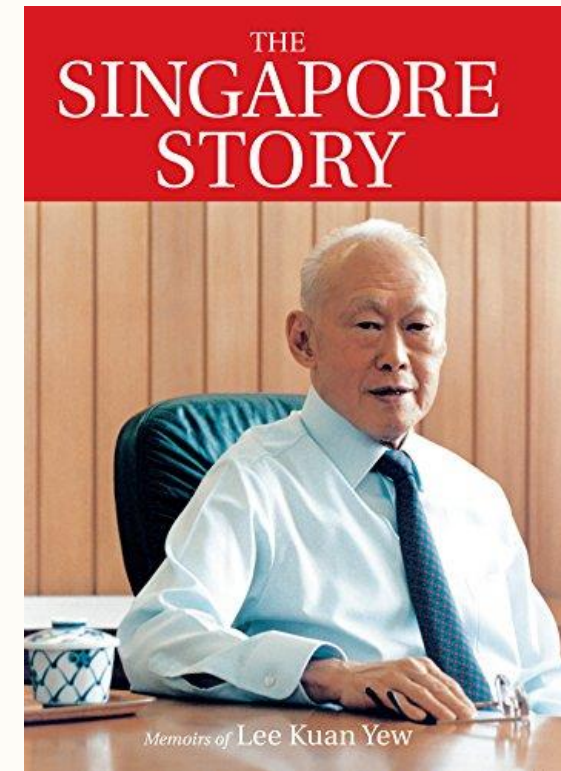
Excerpt from Kelvin W. K. Ng,
“Military Government and its
Discontents: The Significance of the
British Military Administration in the
History of Singapore and Malaya”

**Do you agree with the section title
used by the author? How did the
BMA “lose the peace”?**



The BMA's Mentality

“The men now in charge – majors, colonels, brigadiers – knew they would be in power only until they were demobilized, when their wartime commissions would vanish like Cinderella’s coach. The pumpkin of civilian life to which they would then be reduced was at the back of their minds, and many made the most of their temporary authority” - LKY



A Defence of the BMA

“I give the BMA credit for... improving conditions as fast as possible. But they were also handicapped because they had to turn from a war machine into a civil machine. Because they had all along been prepared... for a war against Singapore and Malaysia. And now it was a takeover, but they did help as far as they could ... they did their best. Anyway they instilled confidence back in us.”

- Lim Choo Sye, Teacher at SJI during the BMA



Problems of Post-war Singapore

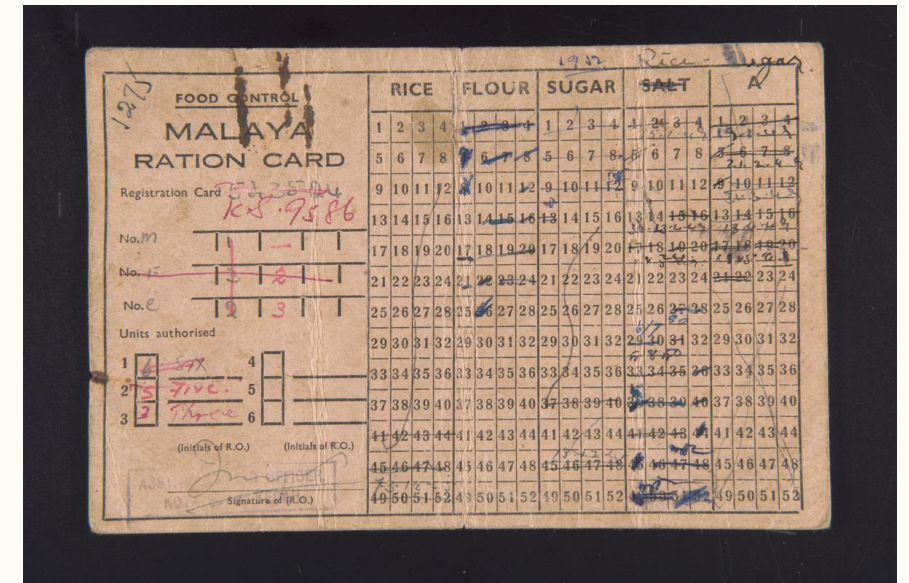
A journey through angry letters addressed
to the Straits Times

Task: Why do you have to be mad?

- As we go through the experiences of Singaporeans in the immediate post-war period, what better way to hear about it than in the own words of those living in that era
- NewspaperSG has archived countless letters from irate readers about the various problems that plagued post-war Singapore, and a few prominent issues can be observed
- **Fill up the columns in the worksheet to take note of the source of people's discontent and what were their demands**
- **At the end, also consider the perspective of the British administration and the difficulties of governing post-war Singapore**

Problem #1: Food shortages and other essentials

- After the war, shipping routes were disorganized and neighbouring countries had no surplus to export
- Prices of essential goods soared to ten times the pre-war level, rice soared to 30-40 times
- In May 1947, rice ration was equivalent to the lowest point during Japanese Occupation



Source A

Queued Up Four Times

I WISH to call attention to the deplorable conditions existing daily at the Food Controller's office at Maxwell Road.

Due to the impossible length of the queue and the slowness of its progress I was unsuccessful on four different occasions in having my rice ration card renewed.

May I suggest that this Department should allow the various retailers to undertake the work of renewing old ration cards, instead of trying to perform a job which it is obviously too understaffed to accomplish.

"A CITIZEN"

Singapore.

Source B

Prawns: Six Weeks

AFTER reading the news item in the Straits Times headed "Gaol For Profiteer," which reports that a fishmonger was sentenced to six weeks' imprisonment for selling prawns at 30 cents above the controlled price, I am wondering if there is sufficient prison accommodation for the thousands of food profiteers who are still at large.

Imprisonment holds no terror for the profiteers, who will certainly not be slow to realize that there is a shortage of everything—including prison space.

WONG TET FONG.

Singapore.

Straits Times Forum Letters, 1946

The people are fed up

Problem #2: Overcrowding and housing shortage

- Singapore's population in 1945 was 1 million, double of pre-war population, partly due to new influx of immigrants
- Severe overcrowding in the cities and almost 100,000 lived as squatters or in slums
- 1947 survey revealed that only one-third of the population was housed satisfactorily



Housing In 1947

THE Governor in his New Year broadcast said that plans are under consideration for the extension of housing accommodation for the public in 1947.

Yet the Singapore Improvement Trust has repeatedly declared itself unable to build any new homes during 1947. We are also not aware that Government has made any further grants to the S.I.T.

Neither have we heard of plans or provisions for the building of quarters for Govt. or Municipal employees.

The Governor's broadcast was the first time we have heard of any housing scheme for 1947.

We would like, if possible, to be assured that the Governor's promise was serious and will be carried out in 1947.

Could not these "plans" be also broadcast to the public?

'QUESTIONER'

Singapore.

Housing Standstill: Twiddling Thumbs

THE chairman of the Singapore Rural Board, Mr. C. W. A. Sennett, at the last meeting gave us some very interesting facts about the housing shortage.

His figure of one quarter of a million people out of three quarters of a million needing houses in Singapore gives an alarming picture of the extent of the shortage. They indeed give good cause to call for crisis legislation for prohibition of non-essential building.

Building houses has ceased to be profitable to private owners, who have therefore turned their attention towards more profitable buildings of non-essential types.

Government should therefore step in, introduce legislation to prohibit non-essential building, and engage in housing projects itself.

Straits Times Forum Letters, 1947

*Ten people, one apartment, one
Singapore...*

Problem #3: Unemployment and low wages

- BMA employed 102,000 as reconstruction workers but only at pre-war wages
- Many municipal employees such as firemen and harbour workers were not paid well
- Locals in the administration were also paid lower than British expatriates



Source E

RUBBER IS UP: SO IS RICE

AS a result of the devaluation of the pound, the price of rice has risen as well as that of rubber.

It is false to say that devaluation has not increased prices.

It is high time that our high-level administrators faced facts and considered the case of the lower services sympathetically and quickly, instead of using propaganda technique in vain among them.

Government should note the quickness with which the Rubber Arbitration Board under the chairmanship of Professor Silcock reached its decisions.

Creditors are pressing hard, while the cost of living is going up. Yet the Federal Government announces that the salaries question will take a long time to settle.

Dr. Benham knows better than anyone else that "Low wages are dear wages." Well, Doctor, how long are we to wait? Please heal this trouble quickly to avoid the complete collapse of many a Government servant.

SUFFERING JOHN.
Singapore.

Source F

"TIRED AND WEARY"

AS a Government servant, I feel tired, disgusted and discouraged at the news that "temporary and cost of living allowances will continue to be paid on the existing rates of salaries and wages."

The Government knows that the present cost of living is about 400 per cent. higher than in 1941.

More Wages Plea

Government and Municipal employees are getting increments of salary. Are employees of the Singapore Harbour Board not entitled to the same? Those of us who find our salaries insufficient, have to borrow from friends and relatives, but how long can this last?—"Donkey Cart Driver," Singapore.

Straits Times Forum Letters, 1945-1949

Money No Enough

AS OUR READERS SEE IT

\$100 Too Low As A
Starting Salary

Problem #4: Public health and welfare

- Damaged infrastructure led to poor drainage and sanitation
- Rampant spread of tuberculosis and other diseases
- Lack of awareness on sexual health and family planning, which compounded other problems
- Average household had 6 children, up to 20 children in extreme cases



Source G

Stamp-Licking

I THINK it is about time the postal authorities replaced the rollers in all local Post Offices that were provided in pre-war days, so that the public will not have to continue licking stamps after they have been pushed across the counter gum-side down, or picked up after dropping on the floor, contacting dirt and germs.

All sorts of diseases are thus transmitted from licking filthy stamps, especially with the amount of disease in Singapore at the moment.

Singapore. M. TAN.

Source H

T. B. Case In Next Room

A WOMAN living in the same house as myself is suffering from T.B. She refused to be admitted to hospital, and as she is now in the final stages of her sickness and may die at any moment, I shall be glad to know to whom I shall have to apply for disposal of the body should she die.

She has neither money nor friends, and is now living with her two children aged 10 and 12.

ANOTHER OCCUPANT.

Singapore.

SELF-CONTROL NOT BIRTH CONTROL

BIRTH control would cause unhappiness and heartbreaks to the people of Malaya.

Clinics for the purpose of giving out such knowledge would bring on the worst kinds of vices, a whole world of worries and a nightmare of distrust among married couples, especially the illiterate.

The Muslim religion is not in favour of birth control and in a Muslim country like Malaya this should be enough to deter anyone from advocating it.

Then again, most Christian churches are against birth control, so it would not be fair to the Christian peoples if the Government should take a hand in putting before them something that would be against their conscience.

Straits Times Forum Letters, 1947-1949

The people are getting sick... of this nonsense

Problem #5: Disruption of Education

- BMA quickly reopened English and Malay schools, Chinese community followed suit with Chinese schools
- However, there were still too many students as there was an additional generation of overaged students who did not attend school during Japanese Occupation
- Tamil and Chinese schools were still neglected
- The RI campus was also being used by the military at this time



Raffles Institution

Your leader of April 5 very generously suggests that the buildings of Raffles Institution should be made to accommodate the W.R.N.S. instead of the R.A.F.

Extremely generous of you indeed, with somebody else's property. Do you know that we have been waiting for the R.A.F. to quit our premises, so that we can resume studies in our own buildings?—Rafflesian, Singapore.

“Free Compulsory Education”— Where Is It?

Rations By Turn?

Source J

Source I

Raffles Exiles

SINCE the re-opening of schools after the liberation, we boys of Raffles Institution have been using the premises of other schools.

In the first term we borrowed St. Joseph's Institution in the afternoons, experiencing great inconvenience, and now in Monks Hill Boy's School, though given the morning session, we have almost the same difficulties.

Not being in our own building we are deprived of school games, afternoon classes, science classes and many other important school activities.

We have been promised an early de-requisitioning of our school many times, but that never comes true.

Singapore.

WAHAB

Why can't we have Government Vernacular Schools for all, instead of the old policy of spending annually about \$63 on the education of every pupil attending a Government English school, \$37 on a pupil attending a Government-aided English (Mission) school, and a grant-in-aid of about \$5 for a child attending a vernacular school?

Isn't it better to spend a million dollars more on our children than on the Public Relations Department? Isn't this method of tackling crime and politics in schools more effective and lasting?

HUMBLE LIU.

Singapore.

(It is the Malayan Union, not Singapore, that is spending a million dollars on its Public Relations Department.—Ed. S.T.)

Straits Times Forum Letters, 1946

The author's name? Joseph “We Want More” Schooling

May Holiday Homework: The lads doth protest too much

- The year is 1948
- The resumption of British rule initially brought hope for a better age, but, three years on, the life that Singaporeans hoped for had not yet emerged
- Next week, there is to be a mass demonstration at City Hall to protest the ineffectiveness of the British administration in addressing these issues and you have decided to attend
- **Pick one problem that Singaporeans faced after the war and design the placard/slogan that you would hold at the protest**