

Rise of Local Activism (T3W4 Lesson 1)

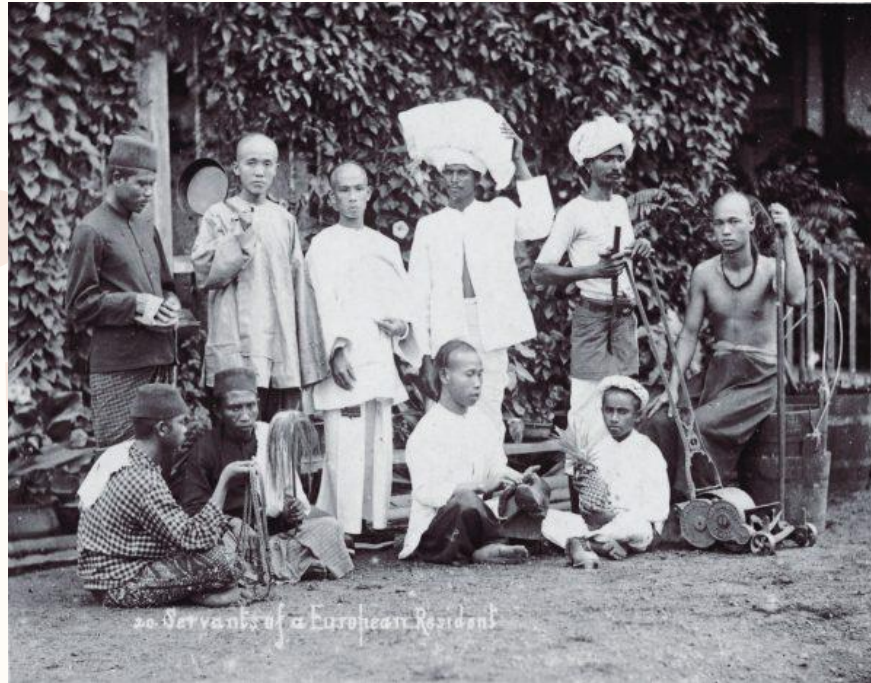
You have just taken the first step in your
political awakening

What is activism?

- It refers to vigorous efforts to bring about reforms and make changes to society
- Usually a response to certain perceived injustice or social issue
- Involves the use of protests, campaigns, criticisms, strikes, or even violence
- Different groups will focus on different priorities and issues



The Situation in Singapore



- The post-war period marked a drastic shift in the mindset of the locals
- Life had not gone back to normal and many groups still found themselves discontented
- With the loss of prestige suffered by the British, locals had found their voice and were more willing to question the colonial masters

Task: Worksheet Section D

As we learn about each group, do consider the following questions and fill in the respective sections in the worksheet

1. **Current Situation/Problems:** What specific issues were each distinct group facing during the post-war years?
2. **Their Responses:** How did each group try to address their situation and make an impact?

Supplementary articles for these communities have also been put up in IVY

Group #1: The Chinese Community

- Chinese schools continued to be neglected, overcrowded and understaffed
- After the Communist victory in China, colonial government banned visitors to China from returning back to Singapore
- Chinese-educated students had limited opportunities for employment and universities



Group #1: The Chinese Community



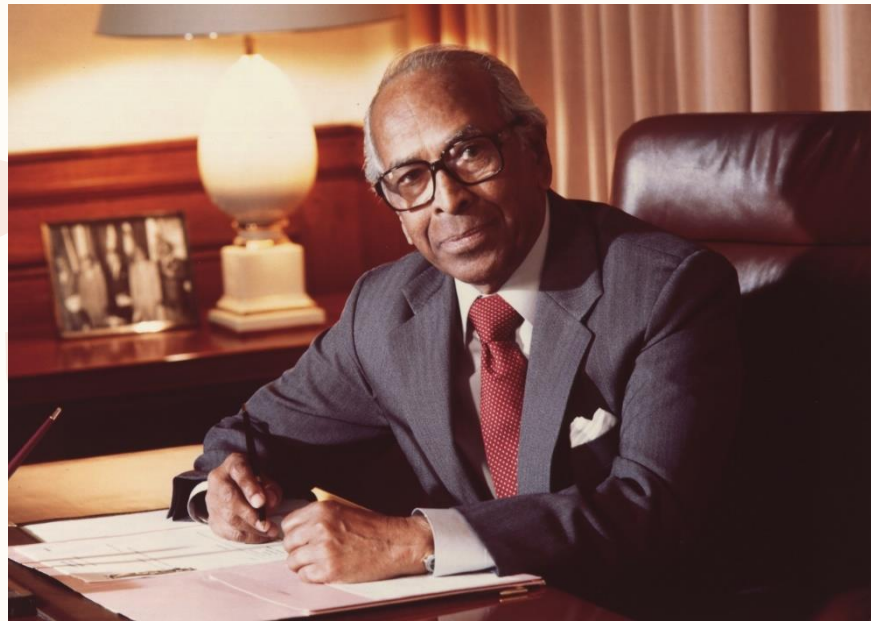
- Fought unsuccessfully to have China-born residents to be given voting rights
- Eventually took things in their own hands and raised funds for a Chinese-language university, Nanyang University
- Chinese businessmen also formed their own political party to protect Chinese rights

Group #2: The Indian Community

- Being a minority, Indians were especially anxious about their future in Singapore
- Many of them were also inspired by political developments happening back in India
- Many English-educated Indian intellectuals formed the foundations of both the left-wing radical movement and the conservative movement
- 8 out of 15 candidates in the 1948 election were Indian



Sinnathambiyar Rajaratnam – The pen that wrote Singapore's future



- After his studies in RI, S. Rajaratnam studied law in King's College London in 1935
- Joined the Left Book Club, a group that discussed left-wing ideas through meetings, rallies and book readings
- Returned to work as a journalist in Singapore and wrote many anti-British editorials in his weekly column "I Write as I Please"
- Attracted the attention of Lee Kuan Yew and other pioneers who then founded the PAP together

Group #3: Women

- During that time, women faced numerous challenges in society and even at home
- Constance Goh: Set up the first family planning clinic in Singapore, educated other women on contraceptives
- Mrs Mohamed Siraj: Fought on the behalf of Muslim wives; husbands can only marry additional wives with their consent, cannot divorce at will



Protecting the rights of Muslim women

“During that time (1950s), men could divorce their wives just by verbalising the divorce and paying them an alimony of \$30 for three months even if they had children. It was not fair, but women had no rights and could not protect themselves.

We met the legislators and we brought forward issues like the divorce and polygamy laws. We also told them that Muslims needed a place where women could go and bring up their issues and achieve more rights, and that ended up being the Syariah Court.”

- Mrs Mohamed Siraj, founder of the Young Women's Muslim Association



Group #4: The Communists

- At the end of the Japanese Occupation, the Malayan People's Anti-Japanese Army was seen as heroes by the people
- The party that formed it, the Malayan Communist Party were also recognised by Lord Mountbatten as a legal party
- They saw themselves as the ones to lead the population to assert independence against the British

More context on the Communist movement can be found in pp. 64-66 of the textbook



Group #4: The Communists



- Established a newspaper, The New Democracy, which attacked the BMA and demanded independence
- MCP's General Labour Union organised demonstrations and strikes against unemployment and low wages
- Organised a successful strike by 7000 dock workers in Oct 1945
- However, the workers only wanted a better livelihood, did not share MCP's desire for independence