

The Challenge of the Information Society: Implications for Singapore Politics

Lee Boon Hiok*

Much has been written about the impact of the information society on social, economic and political life. The argument is that the post-industrial society, as Daniel Bell has characterised it, will rely heavily on information technology in existing and yet to be created activities.⁽¹⁾ The labour force will be concentrated in the professional and technical services rather than in the manufacturing and distributive industries. The emphasis on information technology in the post-industrial society will cover the use of computer technology, telecommunications and office systems in all aspects of information flows—from collection and processing, to storage, packaging and dissemination. In turn the information economy will embrace, as a Senior Minister in the Singapore government points out, a wide range of economic activities. They include telecommunications, mass media operations, professional services, consultancy, banking, advertising, public relations and education at all levels.⁽²⁾

This paper analyses the impact of the information society on political life in Singapore. The first section examines the political and economic environment which have encouraged the growth of an information society in Singapore. It suggests that the Singapore government's plan to develop many of the features of a post-industrial society as a major strategy of its developmental policies have resulted in a commitment to expand on information technology to facilitate the country's development. The following section focusses on the information society on various aspects of Singapore politics. They include topics such as the political party system, and the relationship of the mass media to politics. A major thesis of this paper is that although the impact of the information society may be quite considerable on politics

* Professor, Department of Political Science, National University of Singapore

(1) Daniel Bell, *The Coming of Post-Industrial Society*, New York: Basic Books, 1973.

(2) S. Rajaratnam, "Information Technology: How Singapore's Economy Can Benefit," *The Straits Times*, 20 March, 1986.

in Singapore, the analysis must take into account other aspects of Singapore society which determine crucially the nature and style of politics.

A. The Growth of an Information Society

Singapore's strong commitment to an information society is reflected in the Report of the Economic Committee set up recently to identify new directions for the Singapore economy. The Committee was established in 1985 to give clear guidelines to take Singapore out of its current economic recession. The chapter on information technology (IT) in the Report makes a number of key recommendations which stress the importance of IT in Singapore's future. The Report argues that companies in both manufacturing and services must fully utilise the advances in IT to gain a competitive edge. The Report states that Singapore should exploit the opportunities of IT as a new growth industry. To this end, a consolidated national IT strategy should be implemented, subsuming the present national computerisation effort. The strategy should be spearheaded by the National Computer Board (NCB), a government statutory organisation. The Report also recommends a proposed IT strategy which includes the development of a group of IT professionals and experts, the cultivation of an IT culture particularly in the schools, the further improvement of telecommunication facilities, the development of an IT industry, the development of a local capability in applied research in IT, and the NCB's central role in promoting various aspects of IT. Recently, an Information Technology Institute (ITI) was established under the supervision of the NCB to coordinate IT activities among the various professions and economic activities.⁽³⁾ The emphasis by the Singapore government on IT has to be looked at from the over-all perspective of the country's developmental strategy. After independence in 1965, Singapore recognized for reasons of economic and political survival that the economy would have to shift from one which relied heavily on shipping, insurance, an entrepot trade and the British military bases, to one which stressed industrialization, banking, finance and the tourist trade. This meant a shift in the economy from an import substitution policy to an outward-looking export-oriented policy of industri-

(3) Republic of Singapore, *Report of the Economic Committee, the Singapore Economy: New Directions* (Singapore: Ministry of Trade and Industry, 1986); see also *Straits Times*, 12 May, 1986, p. 8.

alisation. I do not need to elaborate further on the Singapore government's success in achieving these desired objectives. The move into the post-industrial society represents a further step in the industrialisation strategy which will transform the economy from labour-intensive, low value-added pursuits to higher value-added, higher technology and more skill-intensive economic activities.⁽⁴⁾

The infrastructure for the post-industrial society which stresses IT has, in fact, been developed over the years in Singapore. Computer science is a popular subject in the country's junior colleges and, in 1984, 1,100 junior college students took the subject in their GCE advanced level examinations. Computer clubs, an extracurricular activity for students, have been set up in 134 secondary schools, each with an average of four micro-computer systems. Each junior college is also equipped with a multi-access mini-computer system.⁽⁵⁾ At the tertiary level, the National University of Singapore has a Department of Information Systems and Computer Science which produces about 200 graduates a year, with about 70 per cent in Information Systems and 30 per cent in Computer Science. The University's Institute of Systems Science was established in 1981 and conducts courses for executives and computer professionals in information systems studies. Moreover, the University Library has a large collection of books and periodicals and, in 1986, will computerize all its operations. The Library has also access to a number of data bases including an on-line search service linked to BIALOG in California which has access to 160 data bases covering all disciplines.⁽⁶⁾

Computerization has additionally taken place in the banking sector. In line with the government's policy to promote automation and higher productivity, steps have been taken by Singapore banks to further automate their operations and services. These involve the introduction of automated teller machines, bank Giro services and the automation of the interbank payment systems.⁽⁷⁾ Recently, Citibank established in Singapore, the largest foreign exchange and securities dealing room in Southeast Asia. It has, among other things, a new electronic front-end automatic dealing system and latest communications

(4) Lim Chong Yah, "Singapore: Twenty-Five Years Of Growth," in Republic of Singapore, *Singapore* 1985, (Singapore: Ministry of Communications and Information, 1985), p. 7.

(5) *Ibid.*, p. 217.

(6) *Ibid.*, p. 219.

(7) *Ibid.*, p. 133.

systems. There are also two overseas "hot line" computerized links with Hongkong and Tokyo.⁽⁸⁾

In the field of telecommunications services Singapore is well equipped to meet the challenges of the information society. The government has committed substantial resources to the development of sophisticated postal and telecommunication links with the rest of the world in the belief that this will give the country a competitive edge in the provision of banking, financial and other services. Thus the Telecommunication Authority of Singapore (Telecoms), a statutory board, has an infrastructure comprising a network of satellite earth station antennae, submarine cables, microwave links and radio circuits which provide direct links to most countries in the world.⁽⁹⁾

There is another set of factors which give an added dimension to the development of an information society in Singapore. These are the demographic variables related to literacy, languages literate in, and educational attainment for Singapore. The country's multi-ethnic composition is reflected in the multi-racial 2.5 million population, which in June 1984 was made up of Chinese 1.9 million (76.5 per cent), Malays 373,400 (14.8 per cent), Indians 162,600 (6.4 per cent) and others 57,100 (2.3 per cent). The country's four official languages are, therefore, Malay, Chinese, English and Tamil.⁽¹⁰⁾ Within this multiracial context, the illiteracy rate has decreased from 28 per cent in 1970 to 14.4 per cent in 1984. A comparison of 1970 and 1980 census figures of the languages literate in (for persons aged 10 years and over) shows that, in 1970, 80.3 per cent of the population were literate in one language with Malay having 8.6 per cent, Chinese 40.5 per cent, English 29 per cent and Tamil 2.2 per cent. In 1980, only 62 per cent of the population were literate in one language and the breakdown for the languages was 5.6 per cent Malay, 36 per cent Chinese, 19.1 per cent English and 1.3 per cent Tamil.⁽¹¹⁾

A comparison of persons literate in two or more official languages produces some interesting results. In 1970, 19.1 per cent of the population were literate in two or more official languages while in 1980 this figure had risen to 37.5 per cent. In 1970 persons literate in English and Chinese comprised

(8) Soh Tiang Keng, "All Abuzz at Citibank's New Dealing Room," *Business Times*, 10 May, 1986.

(9) Republic of Singapore, *Singapore* 1985, *op. cit.*, p. 171.

(10) *Ibid.*, p. 30.

(11) Lim Chong Yha, *op. cit.*, p. 18.

8.9 per cent, English and Malay 7.2 per cent, English and Tamil 1.6 per cent, and those with other two languages or more made up 1.4 per cent. In 1980, persons literate in English and Chinese had risen to 22.5 per cent, English and Malay 11.3 per cent, English and Tamil 2.1 per cent, and those with other two or more languages to 1.6 per cent.⁽¹²⁾ The shifts in language literacy were mainly due to the government's educational policy of bilingualism. It is obvious that the English language will become eventually the lingua franca of the country. At present, it is the language used in all institutions of higher learning and the public bureaucracy.⁽¹³⁾

In the period 1960 to 1984, the level of education has also risen. In 1960, there were as many primary school children as in 1984. However, the number of secondary school children during the same period rose 3.1 times, while the number of students in tertiary institutions increased by four times in the corresponding period.⁽¹⁴⁾ Therefore, the profile of the average Singaporean is that he is literate in English and at least one of the other official languages. He is also well-educated, at least to the secondary school level. The ability of the Singaporean to interface with the rest of the English-speaking world, and the implications for the development of an information society cannot be de-emphasised. The Singaporean's knowledge of English allows him access into the vast pool of English-language literature and other materials present in the world today.

The role of the mass media in promoting the growth of an information society in Singapore must also be mentioned. Because of Singapore's central location, importance as a business and financial centre, and sophisticated satellite and cable communications facilities, the country is utilized as a regional base for many international newspapers and magazines. It is estimated that there are over 80 correspondents based in Singapore representing 61 foreign news agencies, news magazines, newspapers and broadcasting stations.⁽¹⁵⁾

For the local press there are in 1986, two in English (the *Straits Times* and the *Business Times*), three in Chinese, one in Malay, one in Tamil and one in Malayalam. Until, July 1985 there was an English-newspaper in

(12) Saw Swee Hock, *Demographic Trends in Singapore*, Singapore: Department of Statistics, 1981, p. 29.

(13) *Ibid.*

(14) Lim Chong Yah, *op. cit.*

(15) Republic of Singapore, *Singapore* 1985, *op. cit.*, p. 175.

the afternoons called the Singapore Monitor, which had been in publication for three years. The Monitor closed down because of severe financial problems which left the Straits Times with a monopoly of the English language news. It should be noted that nearly all the major newspapers in Singapore are under the control of a holding company formed in 1984, called Singapore Press Holdings Limited. Previous to that there had been two major newspaper companies, the Singapore News and Publications Limited and the Times Publishing Berhad. The officially-stated reasons for the merger were for long-term economies of scale, and to create a major publishing base with both substantial financial and human resources.⁽¹⁶⁾

Local radio and television is in the hands of a statutory board, the Singapore Broadcasting Corporation (SBC), formed in February 1980. Programmes are in Singapore's official languages and there are four radio channels, each focussing on one of the four official languages, together with a fifth channel devoted to cultural programmes. There are three television channels which are transmitted on channels 5, 8 and 12. Channel 5 carries mainly English and Malay programmes and channel 8 has Mandarin and Tamil programmes. In January 1984, channel 12 was introduced specializing in cultural, educational and related programmes. We will defer discussion of the impact of the mass media on Singapore politics to the next section.

B. The Information Society and Singapore Politics

The discussion in the previous section indicates that many of the trappings of the information society are present, in varying degrees in the Singapore context. Thus, there is an IT infrastructure being developed in the country, a predominantly literate and English-speaking population, and a sophisticated communications and media network linking Singapore with the rest of the world. The task of this section is to examine the impact of the information society on various aspects of Singapore politics.

If we examine the literature linking the information society with politics, we have a great variety of views, sometimes conflicting, on the topic. One

(16) *Ibid.*, p. 176; see also V.G. Kulkarni, "Death in the Afternoon," *Far Eastern Economic Review (FEER)*, 25 July, 1985, and Eddie C.Y. Kuo, "Communication Policy and National Development," in Peter S.J. Chen, *Singapore Development Policies and Trends*, Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1983, pp. 268-281.

work on the subject envisages the following developments:

"Resistance to bureaucracy, claiming of social rights, determination of social policy, and demands for social and economic benefits may increasingly be effected by collective negotiation or action through participatory citizen movements, communities of interests, pressure groupings of the class action and advocacy type...This political process may by no means necessarily be amiable, even peaceable; confrontations of communities of interest may often be of an adversary nature."⁽¹⁷⁾

It would appear that many of these developments in politics often attributed to the growth of an information society may be, in fact, assigned to the more general phenomena of modernization and social change within societies. To isolate the influence of the information society and IT in shaping the course of politics may be a difficult and challenging task. With these considerations in mind let us look at the Singapore case from two viewpoints. The topics are the political party system, and the mass media and politics. The reason for choosing these topics is that they seem to me, within the Singapore context, to be more susceptible to the influences of the information society.

Scholars have characterised Singapore as a one-party dominant system.⁽¹⁸⁾ In such a political system one party dominates the legislature and much of political life. However, the existence of other political parties is tolerated but they tend to be weak and ineffectual, often becoming barely visible just before elections. The ruling People's Action Party (PAP) dominates all aspects of political life in Singapore, including the legislature, where between 1968 and 1981, it occupied all the parliamentary seats. The relative weakness of the opposition in Singapore can be explained by their leadership and financial problems,⁽¹⁹⁾ and also by the PAP's success over the years in delivering the economic and social goods. Elsewhere, I have analysed the PAP's institutionalisation of its power over the years, and one major strategy utilized has been the development of formal and informal linkages with key institutions

(17) E.J. Josey, *The Information Society: Issues and Answers*, Phoenix, Arizona: The Oryx Press, 1978, p. 1.

(18) Chan Heng Chee, *The Dynamics of One Party Dominance: The PAP at the Grassroots*, Singapore: Singapore University Press, 1976.

(19) Thomas Bellows, *The People's Action Party: The Emergence of a Dominant Party System*, Yale University, Southeast Asia Studies, Monograph Series, No. 14, 1970, pp. 67-100.

in Singapore society. These include the civil bureaucracy, trade unions and the grassroots institutions.⁽²⁰⁾

In recent years there has been a small resurgence in the opposition ranks. In October 1981, at the Anson by-election an opposition candidate from the Workers' Party (WP) was elected to Parliament. In the December 1984 general election the WP candidate retained his seat, and he was joined in the 79 seat unicameral parliament by another elected member from the Singapore Democratic Party (SDP), who was elected to the Potong Pasir constituency. Bearing in mind these developments, what changes could take place in the future in the political party system and what would be the impact of the information society in influencing these changes?

The conventional wisdom is that the growth of the information society will result in the rapid growth of many diverse "communities of interest."⁽²¹⁾ These could range from very small ones that serve very narrow scientific or cultural interests to the very large ones such as the nongovernmental organisations. The argument is that the information society will create new groups, with separate but also often complementary interests. From the political viewpoint, these groups being more educated and professionally competent may agitate for a greater say in the political arena.

Have new communities of interest developed in Singapore and will these groups have an impact on politics and the political party system? In addition to the increases in literacy rate and educational attainment mentioned earlier, there have been changes in the age structure of Singapore voters. It has been pointed out that in each successive election since 1968, the young voter has grown in strength as a component of the electorate. For example, in the 1968 general election, those aged between 21~23 comprised 9 per cent of the electorate, while those aged 24 years and more comprised the remaining 91 per cent. In the 1972 general election those aged between 21~27 years constituted 26 per cent of the electorate, while those aged 28 and more were 74 per cent. In 1976, the 21~31 age group made up 39 per cent of the electorate, and those aged 32 years and more, 61 per cent. In the 1980 general election there was an equal balance of voters in the

(20) Lee Boon Hiok, "Political Institutionalization in Singapore," in R.S. Scalapino and Jusuf Wanadi, eds., *Political Institutionalization in Asia*, Berkeley: University of California Press, in press.

(21) Hiroshi Inose and John R. Pierce, *Information Technology and Civilization*, New York: W.H. Freeman and Company, 1984, pp. 226-228.

electorate. In the 1984 general election, however, those aged below 40 years comprised 40 per cent of the population, and the above 40 formed 60 per cent of the electorate. In 1988, it is estimated that those aged between 21~43 will constitute 68.5 per cent of the electorate.⁽²²⁾

A number of factors contributed to the PAP's loss of two seats in the 1984 general election. The PAP's share of total votes cast also went down from 75.5 per cent in 1980 to 62.9 per cent in 1984. The impact of the younger and better educated voting population and a series of unpopular measures introduced during election year were reinforced by the belief of a sample survey of voters aged between 21~24 years that there was need for an opposition in Parliament.⁽²³⁾ The PAP has in fact attempted to relate more to this group of younger voters through its process of "self-renewal" which has sought to identify a new set of political leaders to eventually replace the older elite.⁽²⁴⁾

In the light of these developments is the political party system going to become one where the PAP does not exert as much influence as it has in the past? Various scenarios, of course, can be spelt out regarding the course of future politics in Singapore⁽²⁵⁾, but a possible development in the future may be that the opposition parties gain a bit more foothold in the Singapore Parliament. But the extent of their advance will very much depend on the response of the PAP to the perceived new demands of the voting population who have become acutely concerned about political issues. The likelihood of new "communities of interest" linking themselves with existing opposition parties or forming new parties are not very good. Most likely, the new educated elite will channel their political demands towards the ruling party, with the hope that their views will be accommodated. The effectiveness of these groups will very much depend on their ability to combine with each other to make their views heard by government.

(22) *The Straits Times*, 25 July, 1984; The Prime Minister's Address in Parliament during the Passage of the Opposition Non-constituency M.P. Bill; cited in Chan Heng Chee, "The PAP and the Nineties: The Politics of Anticipation," Paper delivered at CSIS Chiangmai, Thailand Conference, January 1985.

(23) *Straits Times*, 4 December, 1984; see also Lee Boon Hiok, "Singapore in 1984: A Time For Reflection and a Time For Change," in *Southeast Asian Affairs*, Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1985, pp. 297-305.

(24) Jon S.T. Quah, "Singapore in 1983: The Continuing Search for Talent," *Asian Survey*, XXIV, no. 2, February 1984, pp. 178-186.

(25) Chan Heng Chee, "Politics of Anticipation," *op. cit.*

The new interest and occupational groups created by the coming of the information society will still be a minority in Singapore. It must be remembered that although Singapore ranks high among the developing nations⁽²⁶⁾, only a small percentage of the country's population has tertiary education. The 1980 Census figures for persons aged 10 years and over by highest qualification indicates that only 2.7 per cent have tertiary education. Persons with no qualification amounted to 34.9 per cent, primary education 44.3 per cent, and secondary education 18.1 per cent.⁽²⁷⁾ Moreover, a substantial minority of persons in the service and IT industries of the future may not be all professionals and technicians. They may be persons without tertiary education, occupying fairly mundane and unexciting jobs.⁽²⁸⁾

In the previous section we discussed the role of the mass media in promoting the growth of an information society in Singapore. Let us now attempt to examine more closely the relationship of the media with Singapore politics, focusing mainly on the press and television. Like most developing countries the Singapore government has been acutely aware of the importance of the mass media in the nation building process. Like most governments, also, the PAP government has sought to exert some sort of control over the output and content of the mass media, recognizing that the media are important agents for the transmission of political values and attitudes. In fact, as one writer describes it, "the development of mass media communication has been closely associated with rapid social and economic change in the Republic during the past decades."⁽²⁹⁾ The political leadership has, therefore, attempted to mould the minds of Singaporeans through a number of "legal and institutional constraints to guide the actual operation and functioning of the communication system."⁽³⁰⁾

Legal measures include the Undesirable Publication Act (1967) which prohibits the importation, sale or circulation of publications published or

(26) In terms of GNP per capita, Singapore ranks 22 in 1983 at U.S. \$6,620; see *Straits Times*, 14, May, 1986.

(27) Saw Swee Hock, *op. cit.*, p. 31.

(28) Robert Heilbroner, in fact, has pointed out that service workers in the new industrial society could be janitors, bartenders, dishwashers and so on; see Robert Heilbroner, "Economic Problems of a Post-Industrial Society" *Dissent* Spring 1973, pp.163-76; quoted in Fay M. Blake, "Public Access to Information in the Post-Industrial Society," in E.J. Josey, *op. cit.*, p. 88.

(29) Eddie C.Y. Kuo, *op. cit.*, p. 268.

(30) *Ibid.*, p. 270.

printed outside or within Singapore that are considered to be contrary to the public interest.⁽³¹⁾ There is the Sedition Act (1964) which prohibits behaviour including speeches, publications, and distribution or circulation of such publications with seditious tendency. There is also the well-known and controversial Internal Security Act (1963) which gives wide ranging powers to the political executive to fight subversion and to repel security threats. Under this Act, the Minister for Home Affairs is authorised to prohibit the printing, publication, sale, issue, circulation or possession of a document or publication deemed prejudicial to the national interest, public order or society of Singapore.

As explained earlier, the press in Singapore is from the corporate viewpoint consolidated into a single holding company, the Singapore Press Holdings Limited. Within this context, the relationship of the press with the government is more tranquil than in the 1960s and early 1970s. During those years the relationship has been described as "tinted with tension, suspicion and the lack of mutual trust."⁽³²⁾ The government was concerned with the press when it raised issues related to ethnic relations and communal conflicts, and it also feared foreign control over the local mass media. Two English language newspapers were closed for alleged foreign funding and control. Also four top executives of a Chinese newspaper were detained on charges, under the Internal Security Act, of glamourising the communist way of life and trying to stir Chinese racial emotions.⁽³³⁾

More recently, however, the government has utilized the local press as a public forum for the articulation of public opinion. This has been achieved principally through the "Letters to the Press" column in the newspapers which publish a variety of letters on social, economic and political issues. For example, after the December 1984 general election a letter to the press argued that the PAP did not have sufficient feedback channels and that a centralised feedback organisation be established for such a purpose.⁽³⁴⁾ Another view argued that PAP leaders "have not quite got their fingers on the pulse. Although the signals have been sent, the PAP have not read them accurately."⁽³⁵⁾ The PAP government's recognition of the importance of the

(31) *Ibid.* 274-276.

(32) *Ibid.*, p. 271.

(33) *Ibid.*

(34) *Straits Times*, 5 January, 1985; p. 17.

(35) *The Singapore Monitor*, 11 January, 1985; p. 14.

press in receiving opinions from the public and transmitting views on governmental policies is evident in the establishment of public relations departments in the governmental ministries and statutory boards. Officers from these departments frequently write to the press to explain governmental policies in response to letters from Singaporeans.

If the local press is in the main "responsible" the foreign press and other publications appear to be more difficult to "control." As Lee Kuan Yew observed, "We are an international junction for ships, aircraft and telecommunications by cable and satellite. People from the richer countries of the West, their magazines, newspapers, television and cinema films, all come in. We are very exposed. It is impossible to insulate Singaporeans from the outside world."⁽³⁶⁾ Foreign publications have always encountered criticism from individual ASEAN and Asian countries on alleged misreporting and distortions of conditions. Recently, Malaysia's prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad has rhetorically asked, "What is the proper place of the powerful media within human society?"⁽³⁷⁾ The occasion for the prime Minister's speech was a conference for ASEAN journalists who met to discuss the question of press freedom and other issues. In Malaysia, both foreign and local journalists were interrogated in late 1985 under the country's Official Secret's Act. In Singapore, a High Court judge imposed heavy fines on a contempt-of-court case involving the Asian Wall Street Journal. The interesting fact from the IT viewpoint is that the Journal prints its Singapore edition using satellite facilities. The five respondents in the case apologised to the Singapore High Court without contesting the case.⁽³⁸⁾ Also, the Singapore government recently gave a Reuters correspondent 48 hours to leave the country for what the government branded "irresponsible" reporting. This was in relation to a widely reprinted story involving a survivor of the March 1986 New World Hotel collapse.⁽³⁹⁾

Although the Singapore government realizes that there are certain limitations to its "control" of foreign media, it has sought to put more teeth into the legislation related to the circulation and distribution of foreign newspapers and magazines within the country. The Newspaper and Printing Presses (Amendment) Bill 1986, when passed will enable the Minister for Communi-

(36) *The Mirror*, 14 June 1971; quoted in Eddie C.Y. Kuo, *op. cit.*, p. 272.

(37) James Chad, "The Media's Proper Place," *FEER*, 3 October, 1985.

(38) Rodney Tasker, "The Press in a Squeeze," *FEER*, 26 December, 1985.

(39) *FEER*, 3 April, 1986.

cations and Information to declare undesirable any newspaper published outside of the Republic as engaging in domestic politics. A number of administrative controls and legal penalties are incorporated into the proposed bill to ban any foreign publication which engages in domestic politics.⁽⁴⁰⁾

Television in Singapore has also been an important part of the information society, and an influential agent for the transmission of values. As mentioned earlier, television and radio in Singapore are managed by a statutory board (SBC) with a certain degree of financial and administrative autonomy. Singaporeans receive programmes from three SBC channels, and can also get programmes from three Malaysian TV channels (two government and one commercial). It is interesting to note that, in 1985, the Housing and Development Board (HDB) which has built public housing for 85 per cent of Singapore's population, announced that it would not be modifying its HDB common antennas to receive programmes from Malaysia's commercial channel. Presumably, this was because the programmes in question had a heavy dose of Chinese dialect movies, which goes against the Singapore government's policy of encouraging Mandarin and not Chinese dialects on TV and radio programmes.

A detailed analysis of the impact of television on shaping political attitudes and values in Singapore is beyond the scope of this paper. However, we should look at one aspect of television viewing in Singapore which relates closely to some of the concerns of the information society. This has to do with the nature and content of TV programmes in Singapore, and their probable impact on the viewers in question. Statistics on viewership of TV programmes in Singapore are available from SBC and research companies such as Survey Research Singapore through their well known Media Index. Also, research done recently by a German scholar on the content of television programmes in Singapore has some interesting findings.

The research was done of a week's programmes in September and October 1982 before the introduction of channel 12. One of the research questions was to locate the behavioural patterns, attitudes, and value orientations implied or explicitly communicated through the television programmes in Singapore. The research indicated that by language of programme English made up 59.2 per cent, Chinese 27.7 per cent, Malay 6.7 per cent and Tamil 6.4 per cent. Again, the proportion of SBC productions and imported

(40) "Tighter Control of Foreign Publications," *Business Times*, 6 May, 1986.

programmes was 27.1 per cent to 72.9 per cent. Of the imported programmes 50.9 per cent were of western origin and the top three sources of imported programmes were, by country of origin, the USA (35.9 per cent), Hong Kong (10.6 per cent) and the United Kingdom (10.1 per cent). Finally, the types of SBC productions (locally produced) were news (35.3 per cent), shows (22.3 per cent), opinions (10.6 per cent), documentary (9.5 per cent) and children's programmes (7.7 per cent).

Heidt's findings warrant closer scrutiny but we can see at once some of the implications of the results for our own research interests. The heavy content of English language programmes reinforces the Singapore government's objective of developing English as the premier language of communication for the country. However, the heavy reliance on western programmes especially those from the U.S. implies that some degree of care may have to be taken in the selection of such programmes. In fact, there is a SBC department in charge of programme acquisition and scheduling, which reviews overseas programmes for eventual screening on TV. SBC is also working towards reducing the heavy reliance on foreign programmes and one senior official is said to favour a 50/50 ratio. Presumably, a greater reliance on locally produced programmes will be influenced crucially by the extent of financial and administrative resources, in addition to questions about their social and political implications. For locally produced programmes, especially for the news, opinion and documentary items, the reliance on foreign sources by the local producers would affect crucially their themes and content. Cases in point are two locally produced English language current affairs programmes "Friday Background" and "Feedback". The first programme often relies on foreign footage and concentrates on local, regional and international issues, while the second programme looks mainly at local issues. There is always the danger of becoming too parochial in one's perspective towards the world, and such a development for Singapore TV programmes may have a potentially negative impact on the development of an information society.

C. Conclusion

This paper has utilized the concept of the information society and linked

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- (41) This discussion is based on Erhard U. Heidt, *Television in Singapore: An Analysis of a Week's Viewing*, Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1984.

it to politics in Singapore. The analysis demonstrates that Singapore has a number of features of the information society such as a commitment to the development of IT, a sophisticated telecommunications structure, and a literate and fairly well educated population which views English as the premier language. The ability of Singapore to tune in with the rest of the technological world, has thus been an important factor in promoting its growth in past years. For Singapore to continue its quest for development in the post-industrial society, the country must continue to be receptive to new ideas especially those that will promote its economic growth.

Such a stance, however, brings along with it values, attitudes and modes of behavior which may be detrimental for the society as a whole. The PAP government has recognized that in an open society such as Singapore it may be difficult to shut off completely the flow of all "undesirable" information. The PAP government has been in the past successful as the gatekeeper screening the entry of undesirable values and influences into the country. But because there are often multiple entry points into the country, given the nature of the technological and relatively open society, the passage of certain views and ideas cannot be totally prevented. This is despite the variety of legal and other measures which the government may utilize to prevent the dissemination of certain officially disapproved views and opinions. A government that believes in democratic ideals and practices can only point the population to desired objectives, but it cannot in many instances influence their outcomes. It is often said that the price of development for countries are certain unforeseen and unintended costs. This proposition is certainly true for Singapore as the country enters into the information society.