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CONFIDENTIAL

AUSTRALIAN COMMISSION
SINGAPORE

File No. 204
Memo No. 1257

17th August, 1961.

The Secretary,
Dept. of External Affairs,
CANBERRA. A. C. T.

SINGAPORE POLITICS

I am attaching a record of conversation with Mr. James Puthucheary, a prominent member of the recently formed Socialist Front. Mr. Puthucheary, it may be recalled, was detained by the Singapore Special Branch at the same time as Lim Chin Siong in 1957. After the P.A.P. came into office he was released along with other 1957 detainees and was appointed Manager of the Industrial Promotion Board. His comments are at least symptomatic of the attitudes of left-wing intellectuals in Singapore who have joined the new party.

2. I am sending a copy of this memorandum to Kuala Lumpur for information.

E. RYAN

(J. E. Ryan)
First Secretary.

CONFIDENTIAL

File No. 204,

AUSTRALIAN COMMISSION, SINGAPORE

Record of Conversation with Mr. James Puthucheary.

on 10th August, 1961.

Officers Present Mr. J.E. Ryan.
Mr. P. Hardwick, British Council
Mr. P. Coomaraswamy, Singapore lawyer.
Mr. Kwan Khai Seong, Deputy Principal, T.T.C.
Mr. P.S. Raman, Radio Singapore.
Dr. Ong Swee Law, Singapore doctor.

MAIN SUBJECT(S)	CLASSIFICATION
	<p>James Puthucheary was invited by Mr. Coomaraswamy as a guest to the monthly discussion group (which other persons present attend regularly) to discuss the proposed Common Market between Singapore and the Federation. Coomaraswamy has been made one of the legal advisers to the new Socialist Front. In the event, we spent about five minutes on the Common Market and about five hours on a variety of other subjects particularly on Singapore politics and politicians past and present. At 2 a.m., Puthucheary, despite steady application of whiskey sodas was still holding forth fluently. Because of his detention, his subsequent appointment as Manager of the Industrial Promotion Board, and his long and close acquaintance with prominent politicians and unionists, I have tried to gather together some of his comments under relevant headings:</p> <p><u>Lee Kuan Yew</u> Puthucheary expressed the usual distaste of ex-PAP members for Lee's arrogance. He claimed that he still admired and respected Lee but felt that Lee had brought his current troubles down on his own head. He claimed to resent Lee's arrogance not so much on his own behalf (Puthucheary preens himself somewhat on having been admitted to the small circle whom Lee considers his intellectual peers) but on behalf of the many hundreds of unpaid, hard-working, voluntary PAP workers. He mimicked Lee's technique of lecturing his friends and supporters. According to Puthucheary the only time it is possible to make a point register with Lee is during a meal, since Lee loves his food. He went back into PAP party history to illustrate his contention that the struggle between Lee Kuan Yew and Lim Chin Siong was particularly personal. He jeered at Lee's description of the PAP as "his" party which the ex-PAP rebels are trying to filch from him. Puthucheary claimed that the PAP was Lim's party before he went to jail in 1957 because Lim controlled the unions and hence the party's mass support and that he has succeeded, since his release in 1959, in bringing it back under his control again.</p>

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ACTION:

Report prepared by *John Ryan*

*was target for personal
interview*

Lim Chin Siong Puthuchearny's very close friend and associate among the left-wingers is Woodhull who is also a Tamil from Johore Bahru. Puthuchearny's comments were regularly sprinkled with the phrases "Woodhull and myself thought so and so," or "Woodhull and myself then did so and so". He talked not with familiarity but with apparently genuine respect and admiration of Lim Chin Siong. Most other individuals over whom his comments ranged Puthuchearny (like Woodhull) is clever, articulate and inclined to cynicism. I therefore, thought it note-worthy that he seemed to exclude Lim from usual human weaknesses. Puthuchearny clearly thinks that Lim Chin Siong already has effective control of the only political force that matters in Singapore now that the PAP party machine has been weakened and, in part lost to them. He went so far as to say that future history will show Lim to have been one of the great men of South-East Asia.

His break with PAP. Puthuchearny said he never rejoined the PAP when he came out of jail in 1959. He repeated to us what the "Straits Times" reported him as saying last week that, although he had had a hand in framing the original 1956 Constitution of the PAP, this had been altered while he was in jail and now bore no relation to the original party platform. Puthuchearny was resentful about the way his job as Manager of the Industrial Promotion Board had been terminated. He said that he was sacked from the Singapore Public Service, instead of being allowed to resign, with the result that he lost \$4,000 gratuity which was due on resignation. He hastened to add that he did not really care about the money but added that it was a sorry way to treat a man who had contributed \$21,600 to party funds. I asked him what he meant. Puthuchearny explained that it was the practice of PAP men to hand their monthly salary cheques to the Party Treasurer who then allocated a sum (nominated by Lee Kuan Yew) to each individual to meet his essential expenses. The balance went into party funds. Clearly Puthuchearny kept careful track of how much of his salary was mulcted from him (Note: This tends to confirm allegations by Ong Eng Guan when he was sacked by the PAP and an attempted statement ruled out of order by the Speaker - by Dr. Lee Sieh Choh during the Legislative Assembly debate of 18th-19th July).

Present organisation of PAP. I asked Puthuchearny about the present state of party organisation in the PAP. He repeated the figure (given in the Commissioner's memo to External Affairs of 29th July) of thirtyfour branch constituencies having been completely lost to the PAP. He expects two more by-elections to come up fairly shortly (Two members of the Legislative Assembly are seriously ill). He said that Madam Zahora, one of the sick members who was half carried into the Legislative Assembly on 21st July, had in fact signed a statement of protest against the PAP leadership before the debate but later reneged and supported the vote of confidence in the Government.

The interview with Selkirk Puthuchearny was, of course, the instigator of the meeting between Lord Selkirk and the trade unionists which Lee Kuan Yew used as an opening gambit for his attack on the PAP rebels during the debate of 21st July. Puthuchearny said that he was considering writing to the "Straits Times" giving an accurate account of how the meeting came about and what was said. He claimed that this would be desirable because Lee Kuan Yew in giving his account of the meeting, in effect called him a liar (Note: My impression was that Puthuchearny would like it recorded for posterity that he was the instrument of destiny, but has dissuaded by Lim Chin Siong from rushing into print).

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Political and Parliamentary Secretaries Puthuicheary said that the PAP leadership had illustrated their contempt for their own lieutenants by their treatment of the Parliamentary and Political Secretaries. Lim Chin Siong, who was Political Secretary to the Minister of Finance for nearly two years, had only met the Minister (Goh Keng Swee) once. This was when he had made his initial call to pay his respects to Dr. Goh. Puthuicheary said that Lim had spent his office hours educating himself; and particularly in improving his English. (Note: This ingenuous picture rather ignores the fact that during this period Lim was able to build up a powerful and loyal band of supporters for himself and an inter-twined group of trade unions, a task requiring a tremendous amount of time and energy). Fong Swee Suan was dismissed from his post as Political Secretary to the Minister of Labour, according to Puthuicheary, because the Minister (Kenny Byrne) became jealous of the amount of influence he was gaining with the Trade Unions. Puthuicheary claimed that most Parliamentary Secretaries never actually handled an official file.

Economic Development and Common Market. Puthuicheary admitted that he was a "theoretical" economist. He said he had not thought out thoroughly specific implications of the proposal for a Common Market between Singapore and the Federation. This was, in part due to his view that the Federation Government had no serious intention of implementing the proposal. On the subject of Singapore's economic development Puthuicheary claimed to be the author of the Four-Year Economic Development Plan. He expressed complete pessimism about the possibility of the principal objectives being achieved. His pessimism stemmed, he said, from the fact that the Government had proved incapable of the type of leadership needed to get the workers of Singapore to identify themselves with the plan. He considered that the Singapore administrative machine was quite incapable of implementing the plan; he blamed the PAP for a decrease in Public Service efficiency after the present Government came into office.

Prospects for Singapore as an Entrepot Port Puthuicheary spoke fluently and persuasively on the future of Singapore. He said that this was a subject on which he was currently lecturing at the University of Malaya. He said that in his view Singapore was finished as an entrepot centre. He pointed out that the raw material for almost every item which Singapore exported came either from the Federation or Indonesia. Similarly the destination of most of the finished goods which Singapore exported was either the Federation or Indonesia. Statistically therefore, these two countries were involved in something like 80% of Singapore's entrepot transactions. As far as Indonesia was concerned he thought the forced departure of Chinese merchants and traders foreshadowed the end of the long standing trade between Singapore and Indonesia. In the past, transactions had been between Chinese in Indonesia and Chinese in Singapore involving goods on both sides, with Singapore as the exchange centre. With the departure of the Chinese from Indonesia it seemed inevitable that some form of state trading would take its place. He pointed to barter deals between Indonesia and e.g. Soviet bloc countries on the one hand and bulk deals between Indonesian Army personnel and Singapore merchants on the other, which he considers will never again be replaced by traditional Chinese methods.

Comment. Puthuicheary, in all his references to Indonesia, the Federation and Singapore seemed to show contempt for Malays (which term I use to include Indonesians). He seemed to have a great respect for the Chinese which in my experience is not usual for Indians in Singapore. Puthuicheary himself is from Johore as are also Woodhull and Lim Chin Siong. He is not a Singapore citizen. He said he was refused citizenship when he applied two years ago. His references, illustrations and analogies are almost completely Western. He seems to have been brought up to admire English

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nineteenth century liberals. If he wants to illustrate a point historically he is more apt to go back to the Greeks and Romans rather than to oriental models.