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THE ORIGIN AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE SINGAPORE TEACHERS' UNION  
(IN THE POST-WAR COLONIAL PERIOD)

A Thesis

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by

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This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university and to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person, except when due reference is made in the text of the thesis.

Kwa Boo Sun.

October, 1971. :

## SUMMARY

Part I of this study covers the period from 1946 to 1954 when all the commanding positions in the education service were held by expatriate officers. It tries to bring into focus the essence of the colonial system as it affected the trade unionism of teachers in the English schools. Chapter 1 provides the background for the study. Chapters 2 to 6 deal with the working conditions of teachers, the formation of the Singapore Teachers' Union (S.T.U.), its pan-Malayan activities, the salaries commissions, and the struggle for a unified education service.

After the war, teachers were generally disillusioned with the Singapore Teachers' Association and the Malayan Teachers' Federation, which was made up of the teachers' associations in the various States and Settlements in the Malay Peninsula and in Singapore. Their constitution and official patronage made them effete bodies as far as the improvement of the economic and professional interests of teachers was concerned. Many of the locally recruited teachers believed that their interests were apart from and in antagonism to that of the colonial establishment. An independent trade union was considered necessary in order to bring an end to the glaring disparities in salaries, opportunities for promotion, and other conditions of service,

especially those between the expatriate teachers and the locally recruited teachers. The founders of the S.T.U. had been influenced by the radical traditions of the British labour movement. When the S.T.U. was formed on 19 October 1946, it stood firm in its belief that the aided school teachers, who were not regarded as government servants, should be included as members of the Union. In its first year, it played a leading role in the campaign for back pay for the period under Japanese occupation to be paid in full to all government servants.

The motive force of the S.T.U. was its aim of a unified education service for all qualified teachers, government or aided, regardless of their race or sex. They should all be placed on one "basic" scale, the minimum qualification for entry to the scale being the Normal Training Certificate. Holders of this certificate should then start at the initial of the scale, but the differences in the points of entry and the maxima for the non-graduate and the graduate teachers should be minimal. In the unified education service all teachers should have the right to be considered for the most important positions in the education service.

Singapore was made a separate colony after the war, but the leaders of the S.T.U. felt that the aspirations of teachers in Singapore should be set against the background of

Malaya - i.e. the Malay Peninsula and Singapore. They then became involved in the forming of teachers' unions in place of teachers' associations in the Malay Peninsula and were responsible for the establishment of the Malayan Teachers' Union (M.T.U.) on 2 September 1947. The M.T.U. was the central organisation of teachers in the two territories. From the beginning it had not only to be concerned with trade union laws, but also with political questions. In pursuing its aim of a unified education service, it challenged the privileged positions of the expatriate officers. It was most vigorous in promoting the rights of teachers although it had to work within the strict framework of colonial laws, General Orders, and Colonial Regulations. On 8 July 1949, it was declared an illegal organisation. The Conference of Delegates of Teachers' Unions was its successor, and although it was an unregistered body, it represented, while it existed, the hope of the teachers of the two territories for a pan-Malayan body until it was finally dissolved in December 1951. After that year the S.T.U. concentrated on its own problems in Singapore.

The most important of the activities of the M.T.U. concerned the question of salaries. The salaries commissions, appointed at different times during the period, provided a forum for the teachers to present their case, but at the same

time they also reflected the value and prestige which the colonial government was prepared to allow the teaching service. The Trusted Commission (1947) disqualified the graduates of Raffles College and the Normal trained teachers from being considered for the posts of Education Officers. These prize appointments were to be filled by the expatriate teachers. However, the Interim Report (1948) and the Final Report (1949) of the Cowgill Committee did not bar the locally recruited teachers from being considered for the prize appointments. Teaching was for the first time considered as a service that had special characteristics. The Cowgill Committee recommended improved salary for the locally recruited teachers in the English schools, but it did not accept the principles of a unified education service. In 1950 the Benham Committee treated teachers as belonging to just another branch of the public service, and recommended depressed salary scales for the non-graduate teachers based on certain key scales applied for the whole of the public service.

The intensified campaign of the Singapore Teachers' Union for a unified education service finally resulted in the establishment of the 1953 Singapore Education Service Scheme. However, the minimum qualification for admission to the scheme was the Certificate of Education; the course for

the Certificate of Education was started in 1950. The Normal trained teachers, the basic core of teachers in the English schools, were excluded from the unified scheme.

Part II of this study covers the period from 1955 to 1959 when the locally elected government shared power with the colonial officials under the terms of the Rendel Constitution. Chapters 9 to 12 deal with the Normal training issue, the effects of the 1953 Singapore Education Service Scheme, the aspirations of the Graduate Teachers' Association (G.T.A.), the 1958 Singapore Education Service Scheme, and the reaction of the S.T.U. to the new emphasis in education and educational provision with the advent of full internal self-government.

The S.T.U. pressed, to the exclusion of other issues, for the recognition of the Normal Training Certificate as the basis for entry to the 1953 Singapore Education Service Scheme, and proposed the integration of the salary scale of the Normal trained teachers with that of the Certificated teachers in February 1956. This was during the period when the main preoccupation of the Ministry of Education was with the explosive situation that arose from the problems of resolving the place of the Chinese language and education in Singapore. The militancy which the S.T.U. displayed in order



to raise the value of the Normal Training Certificate in 1957 ceased when government teachers were threatened with the General Orders and the forfeiture of their pensions. It was only in September 1962 that the Ministry of Education offered a solution.

The G.T.A., which was formed by the graduate teachers who broke away from the S.T.U. in 1951, was primarily interested in obtaining the same salaries and status as the expatriate officers and the important positions held by them when the policy of Malayanisation came into being. The graduate teachers were the main beneficiaries of the 1953 Singapore Education Service Scheme and its implementation marked the beginning of a period of intense hostility in the relations between the S.T.U. and the G.T.A. The imposition of the 1958 Singapore Education Service Scheme, however, brought the S.T.U., G.T.A., and other organisations of teachers in Singapore together in opposition to the scheme, but there was nothing they could do to reject it. The 1958 Singapore Education Service Scheme was the cause of great unhappiness for teachers for the next ten years. But in 1959 there was hope that, with full internal self-government, the status of teachers would improve.



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## PREFACE

As seen by the government, education serves as a powerful means for "carving out" Singapore's national identity; it is recognised as an instrument for inculcating national consciousness among the multi-racial migrant population and for training the young to meet the demands of the developing industries. However, there is no equivalent recognition accorded to the teachers. Their conditions of work and service are unsatisfactory. Teacher-education and the study of education are not given the importance that they deserve. Teachers are expected to follow diligently the exhortations that the political leaders issue from time to time regarding the teacher's function in society.

The educational function thus prescribed is based on what the government thinks a Singaporean should be, and what the teacher should do in order to create the new Singaporean in terms of the interests and survival of the small island Republic. And the policy of the Singapore Teachers' Union has depended to an unusual degree on the political and social assumptions of the government. But the government contends that the teachers as a whole have not responded whole-heartedly to the changes and new emphasis in education as a result of the accelerated social and economic changes taking place since Singapore separated from Malaysia in 1965.

The appraisal by the teachers themselves at the Modernisation Seminar in February 1971 brought about a sharper consciousness of the failure of the Union in its role both as a trade union and as a professional organisation. They made radical changes in the Union's constitution in order to improve the effectiveness of the Union in such areas as its organisation and administration and the provision of more services for its members. They accepted the educational function laid down for them, but declared that the professional wing of the Union - one result of the seminar - had to face up to the task of

obtaining the right conditions in the school where teachers can use their initiative, and in time determine the areas in which they should be left to exercise their professional autonomy. However, the seminar did not come to grips with the important question of power. Although the Union has existed for the last twenty-five years, it still does not have even the basic right to collective bargaining. It is not consulted on changes in educational policy. The teachers have to know where their power lies and how they can mobilise it to achieve the aims of the Union. This question becomes doubly important in a situation where the ruling party is truculent and brooks no opposition.

In the face of the tasks that the Union sets itself, a knowledge of the origin and development of the Union may reveal some of the underlying causes of the present difficulties, and suggest ways in which further progress might be made. As Part I of this thesis shows, the teacher-unionists were undaunted by the complexity of issues facing them in the post-war colonial period. They evolved principles, and developed methods and means of struggle for bringing about a fairer deal and greater respect for teachers. At the same time their concern for professional matters did not seem to be in doubt.

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## ABBREVIATIONS

A.T.U.A.	...	...	Assistant Trade Union Adviser
C.E.S.	...	...	Colonial Education Service
D. of E.	...	...	Director of Education
G.O.	...	...	General Orders
G.S.B.P.C.	...	...	Government Servants' Back Pay Council
G.T.A.	...	...	Graduate Teachers' Association
J.C.S.A.	...	...	Junior Civil Service Association
J.T.U.	...	...	Johore Teachers' Union
K.T.U.	...	...	Kelantan Teachers' Union
M.A.S.C.	...	...	Malayan Aided Schools' Council
M.T.F.	...	...	Malayan Teachers' Federation
M.T.U.	...	...	Malayan Teachers' Union
N.S.T.U.	...	...	Negri Sembilan Teachers' Union
N.U.T.	...	...	National Union of Teachers
P.M.T.U.	...	...	Pan-Malayan Teachers' Union
P.S.C.	...	...	Public Services Commission
P.T.U.	...	...	Penang Teachers' Union
P.U.T.	...	...	Perak Union of Teachers
R.T.U.	...	...	Registrar of Trade Unions
S.E.S.	...	...	Singapore Education Service
S.T.A.	...	...	Singapore Teachers' Association
S.T.U.	...	...	Singapore Teachers' Union
T.U.A.M.	...	...	Trade Union Adviser, Malaya
T.U.P.	...	...	Teachers' Union of Pahang
U.C.E.S.	...	...	Unified Colonial Education Service
U.K.	...	...	United Kingdom
U.S.T.	...	...	Union of Selangor Teachers