

ROUNDTABLE - Is Singapore a Welfare State?

Date : 18 Mar 2008
Time : 16:00 - 17:30
Venue : ARI Seminar Room
469A Tower Block, Level 10, Bukit Timah Road
National University of Singapore @ BTC



CHAIRPERSON

Dr Chee Heng Leng, Asia Research Institute, National University of Singapore

ABSTRACT

The Singapore state is traditionally strongly interventionist in its provision of basic services through public housing, education, health, education and social services. Yet, it has always maintained that it is not a "welfare" state and resists any attempts to be characterized as such, as it believes that state welfarism creates a subsidy and crutch mentality among people and can cripple the ethics of self-help and hard work. In recent years, the state has had to respond to growing income disparities, wage stagnation, growing costs of living, retirement adequacy and other economic and social challenges due to globalization, economic competition and social and demographic trends. This Roundtable will discuss how these exert demands and pressures on the state and examine its responses in the sphere of economic and social welfare. In the process it will examine Singapore's welfare system and asks whether Singapore is becoming a welfare state.

PANEL SPEAKERS

The Rationale of Government Intervention and Provision of Services

Mr Ravi Menon

Second Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Trade & Industry, Singapore

Government Intervention and Adequacy of Provision of Social Services and Welfare Support

Mrs Ann Elizabeth Wee

Senior Fellow, Dept of Social Work, National University of Singapore

Governance and Welfare: Is Singapore Becoming A (Reluctant) Welfare State?

Dr Ho Khai Leong

Associate Professor, Dept of Political Science, Nanyang Technological University

ABOUT THE SPEAKERS

Mr Ravi Menon is Second Permanent Secretary at Singapore's Ministry of Trade and Industry. His responsibilities include industrial strategy; economic monitoring; innovation, enterprise and R&D; and advancing Singapore's foreign economic policy interests. Mr Menon was Deputy Secretary (Policy) at the Ministry of Finance during 2003-2007, where he was responsible for fiscal policy; tax and expenditure; and government investments and reserves. Prior to that, Mr Menon was Assistant Managing Director at the Monetary Authority of Singapore (MAS). During his 16 years in MAS (1987-2003), Mr Menon helped to formulate monetary policy; directed MAS' corporate visioning exercise; and developed regulatory and liberalisation policies for the banking industry. Mr Menon chairs the inter-agency Economic and Social Research Network which has conducted in-depth studies ranging from the effectiveness of wage supplementation to the nexus between retirement savings and home ownership. He is currently the Deputy Chairman of the Central Provident Fund Board; a board member of the National Research Foundation and the Institute of South Asian Studies; and a board member and Fellow at the Civil Service College where he is editing a book on policy innovations in Singapore. He is on the board of trustees of the Singapore Indian Development Association where, as a member of its Executive Committee (1996-2000), he analysed the educational performance of Indian Singaporean children and made the case for early childhood programmes.

Mrs Ann Elizabeth Wee has lived in Singapore since 1950. Her interest in social policy and social provisions dates professionally from 1955, with two years working in the colonial Social Welfare Dept. and has been reinforced by an ongoing voluntary relationship with the successor institutions of that Department, lasting until the present time – she remains a member of both the Panel of Advisors to the Juvenile Court, and of the Tribunal for the Maintenance of Parents. She was also for many years on committees of the Singapore Children's Society. From 1957 Mrs Wee taught in social work training courses, first in the Social Studies Dept, University of Malaya, and through various institutional reincarnations to what is now the Dept of Social Work, National University of Singapore. Following formal retirement in 1986, Mrs Wee continued part-time teaching up until two months prior to her eightieth birthday: continued good feedback from students, and the tectonics of an imminent downsizing from house to flat, suggested that leaving while the party was still on, was the smart career move. Mrs Wee's publications have been mainly on women and the family, especially in Singapore's history. She has published also on the social implications of housing policy, and in relation to to-day's theme, an article on the then Small Families Improvement Scheme (now HOPE) published in the journal of the Singapore International Foundation and entitled "Two Cheers but Not Quite Three".

Ho Khai Leong (Ph. D.) is Associate Professor, School of Humanities and Social Science, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore, and an associate research fellow at the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Singapore. His current research interests include Singapore politics and policies, corporate governance and administrative reforms. His major work is *The Politics of Policy-making in Singapore* (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 2000) (The new edition is published as *Shared Responsibilities, Unshared Power. The Politics of Policy-making in Singapore* in 2003 by Eastern Universities Press). The latest works he has edited are *Reforming Corporate Governance in Southeast Asia: Economics, Politics and Regulations* (Singapore, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2005), *Rethinking Administrative Reforms in Southeast Asia* (Singapore: Marshall Cavendish Academic, 2006), and *Ensuring Interests: Dynamics of China-Taiwan Relations and Southeast Asia* (Co-editor) (Kuala Lumpur: Institute of China Studies, 2006). He is also the coordinator of History program at School of Humanities of Social Sciences (HSS), NTU, the Vice President of Singapore Society for Asian Studies, and Editor of *Asian Culture*.

REGISTRATION

We would gratefully request that you RSVP to Valerie Yeo at Tel No.6516 5279 or e-mail: valerie.yeo@nus.edu.sg.

CONTACT PERSON(S)

Valerie YEO

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