

STUDY GUIDE

MERDEKA TALKS

15-17 FEBRUARY 2019



NANYANG TECHNOLOGICAL
UNIVERSITY
MODEL UNITED NATIONS



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TECHNOLOGICAL
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SINGAPORE

Chairperson Biographies

Leonard Sim

Leonard is a Year One History and Political Science Double Major student at the National University of Singapore. His MUN journey started in 2012, and has not stopped since, except for a short hiatus in 2016 due to National Service commitments. Cordially known as the “uncle” or “encik” of the local MUN circuit, he has assisted many schools with their various Model UN projects, and has served as a “muntor” to many younger “muntees”.

He hopes to bring his experience and knowledge to NTUMUN’s Merdeka Council to create and experiment with new formats and proceedings, and hopes to create a once-in-a-lifetime experience for delegates. Besides, being a History student, it is only apt that he tackle a topic that is so pertinent to our country’s history.

He may be contacted at leonard.sim@u.nus.edu.

Tiffany Foo

Tiffany started her MUN journey at YNCAPMUN 2015 and has since moved on to participate actively in the Model United Nations scene as a chair, delegate and secretariat member. Most recently, she attained the Best Delegate award at Yale Model United Nations XLIII and served as the Secretary-General of the Singapore International Relations Conference and River Valley Model United Nations. She will also be serving as the Under-Secretary-General for Liaisons at the upcoming AMUNC 2019.

In her free time, Tiffany enjoys a good game of hide-and-seek, hiding from life’s problems, and seeking out bad life choices. Should delegates have any queries regarding NTUMUN 2019 or free drinks to share, do slide into her DMs or drop her a message at tiffanyfoo@u.nus.edu.

Carissa Cheow

On paper, Carissa is supposed to be a sophomore undergraduate in Politics and Philosophy, but in practice, she spends her semesters initiating research projects, writing bad political poetry, and randomly signing up for things that will cause everyone to question her life choices subsequently.

Having founded the Youth Labour Movement in 2017 and handed it over partially to another chair on the dais, NTUMUN 2019 will be Carissa's seventh conference, and she looks forward to seeing what her delegates will bring to the table with the assistance of the four to seven cups of coffee she has on average every morning. Drop her a message at carissa.cheow@gmail.com.

Sun Jia Ying

Jia Ying is a recent graduate of Raffles Institution who was also a debater. She started her MUN journey as a notepasser in Raffles MUN 2015 (good volunteer hours) and has since then attended many more as a delegate and a chair, most recently attaining the Best Delegate award at Harvard Model Congress Asia.

In her free time, Jia Ying has been travelling, doing nothing productive, and binge-watching TV shows such as "The Office" (she is open to any recommendations). She is looking forward to meeting the delegates of NTUMUN 2019, and hope that they have a fruitful experience in the Merdeka committee! She can be contacted at sjysunjaying@gmail.com.

Hew Zi Heng

Zi Heng is a J2 student currently trying to juggle his various commitments alongside with his studies. He initially joined MUN for the purposes of intellectual discussions on pertinent issues but is still searching for such an experience till this day. That said, he has great interest in local and regional issues which drove him to join this council. He is looking forward to the debates of NTUMUN 2019 and wishes delegates a memorable experience in this council and can be contacted via zihenghew@gmail.com.

Introduction to Committee

The term '*merdeka*' is Malay for '*independence*' - with Singapore having elected its first government comprised predominantly of locals, the British were preparing to gradually expand the autonomy granted to the Singapore government, with an eventual goal of independence. Questions emerged regarding this process: "*what would independence entail, how quickly would we become independent, and how independent would Singapore be?*"

Enter the **Merdeka Talks**, a series of constitutional talks initiated by the first democratically-elected, local-born Chief Minister David Marshall, the leader of the incumbent Labour Front-Alliance coalition government. The context? The year was 1955. Until now, you could only vote for a token few Legislative Councillors who formed the minority in a **Legislative Council** dominated by British appointees.

This was set to change: the new Constitution was going to replace the old Council with a new **Legislative Assembly** with local members constituting the majority of all lawmakers in Singapore's highest legislative body. The British had granted Singapore partial internal self-government, in a move which the **Rendel Commission Report** stated as being "*clearly intended as an interim step towards complete self-government*".

The Merdeka Talks were thus born out of a decision by the newly-elected Chief Minister Marshall to lead a 13-member all-party delegation comprising entirely of Singaporean legislators to present a common set of requests to their British counterparts in London, and from this, conduct a series of talks to negotiate the exact terms for complete internal self-government, as a next step towards independence. In this Committee, delegates

will be taking on the portfolios of the **13 Singaporean representatives**, and, across the aisle, the **13 British representatives** on behalf of the colonial administration.

Your task will be to start from scratch with the **first Merdeka Talks** on 23 April, 1956, and commence negotiations with your counterparts. Your objective will be to arrive at an agreement, captured in a set of Recommendations, that will guide your next steps to granting Singapore greater autonomy. You will need to consider how this autonomy would look like, in practical terms: who will take control over which aspects of government? How would the distribution of key ministries of strategic interest be allocated between the British leaders and the Singaporean leaders? Why might your counterparts object to such an arrangement, and how can you bridge this?

Background

Precursor to the Merdeka Talks: The Rendel Commission

The origins of the central question you will be addressing in this Committee as a delegate has to be traced back to the formation of the Constitutional Commission of Singapore, which was subsequently referred to as the **Rendel Commission**, in July 1953 by the then-Governor Sir John Nicoll. Chaired by Sir George Rendel, the Commission comprised of nine members¹: five Singaporean members of the Legislative Council, three British members, and Rendel himself, who was also a British.

The purpose of the Rendel Commission was to conduct a wide-ranging review of the Constitution, with a view to **granting Singapore greater autonomy over internal affairs**² as a British Crown Colony. As such, the Rendel Commission would necessarily have to be seen as the “first step” and precursor to the Merdeka Talks; the objective of the Rendel Commission was partial internal self-government, and the objective of the Merdeka Talks was complete internal self-government. The exact terms of this partial expansion in autonomy were detailed in the **Rendel Constitution**, the resultant document produced as a set of recommendations to address various key considerations by both the British and the Singaporean members of the Commission pertaining to Singapore’s ability to govern itself.

¹ Singapore. Constitutional Commission. (1954). Report of the Constitutional Commission, Singapore. Singapore: Govt. Print. Off., pp. 41, 43. (Call no.: RCLOS 342.5957 SIN)

² Singapore. Constitutional Commission. (1954). Report of the Constitutional Commission, Singapore. Singapore: Govt. Print. Off., p. 5. (Call no.: RCLOS 342.5957 SIN)

Key Considerations of British and Singaporean Stakeholders

What were these considerations?

Firstly, **Singapore's small size** was a major concern that caused both the British colonial administrators, as well as - at that time - Singaporean nationalist political leaders, to doubt the tiny island-state's ability to survive as a fully self-governing territory with complete jurisdiction both over economic affairs and external relations³. There was a general consensus even amongst local politicians acknowledging Singapore's **dependence on Malaya for natural resources**, as well as its **dependence on the British for political expertise** and the ability to command international confidence as a necessary precondition for trade to continue passing through Singaporean ports.

Beyond that, though, the British also had **geopolitical considerations** originating from the commencement of the Cold War immediately after the conclusion of the Second World War. Two key observations emerged amidst this strategic backdrop: the rapid surge of decolonization across former colonies leading to an accelerated expansion in the number of newly-independent nation-states, and the increasing tendency for countries around the world at that time to align towards either the United States (USA) or the Soviet Union (USSR), leading to the consolidation of two opposing political blocs.

The British held the perception that Singapore would **inevitably succumb to Communist influence**⁴ if left to govern itself, both due to its small size making it exceptionally vulnerable to international forces, as well as because of demographic factors, and a

³ Tan, T. Y. (2008). Creating “Greater Malaysia”: Decolonization and the politics of merger. Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, p. 31. (Call no.: RSING 959.5051 TAN)

⁴ Tan, T. Y. (2008). Creating “Greater Malaysia”: Decolonization and the politics of merger. Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, p. 18. (Call no.: RSING 959.5051 TAN)

Communist Singapore was something the British wanted to avert at any cost due to its potential hostility towards the British. The **prospect of growing political instability and social unrest** was also a source of disquiet for local leaders, who were all too conscious of the implications that this had on Singapore's survival: it could undermine international confidence and hence threaten Singapore's international trade, crippling its already-dependent economy⁵.

⁵ Rendel, G. (1957). *The sword and the olive; recollections of diplomacy and the foreign service, 1913–1954*. London: John Murray, p. 333. (Call no.: RCLOS 327.20924 REN)



Perception of the bipolar division of the world during the Cold War and implications on Singapore.

Source: King's College London, 14 Nov 2018

With that said, though, the British had at that time observed that **for what it is worth**, the general public in Singapore really has no interest in politics and were concerned that this would obstruct the formation of a properly-functioning democratic government in Singapore⁶. This was primarily a consequence of the initially-limited introduction of voting rights brought into effect by the 1948 constitution, where only British subjects who had lived in Singapore for one year prior to an election could vote - meaning to say that, **a significant majority of the migrant population living in Singapore were excluded from the political process** and not granted the right to vote or likewise participate in elections⁷.

⁶ Drysdale, J. G. S. (1984). Singapore: Struggle for success. Singapore: Times Books International, pp. 38-39. (Call no. RSING 959.57 DRY-[HIS])

⁷ Singapore. Constitutional Commission. (1954). Report of the Constitutional Commission, Singapore. Singapore: Govt. Print. Off., pp. 7-8. (Call no.: RCLOS 342.5957 SIN)

Nevertheless, while the British did not explicitly pinpoint the above as the root cause for the disinterest in politics amongst locals, there was clear intent within the Rendel Constitution to expand public participation in politics through encouraging more locals to take an active interest in politics.

These considerations, along with additional new considerations that did not emerge during the Commission, will naturally resurface during the Merdeka Talks. This is due to the nature of **the Merdeka Talks as a “next step” after the Rendel Commission**, where discussions will be held to explore an expansion from partial to complete internal self-government. Delegates are expected to take these into account in identifying how their respective portfolios would respond to these considerations when reviewing possible arrangements for full internal autonomy.

Singapore’s Political Context before The Rendel Constitution

With the above considered, therefore, the implications of the recommendations put forth in the Rendel Commission Report, which would subsequently inform the Rendel Constitution, would lay a significant part of the foundation for the discussions to be held during the Merdeka Talks - the focus of your Committee as a delegate. In order to fully make sense of the political significance of the changes brought about by the Rendel Constitution, delegates should be sufficiently informed on the state of affairs prior to its implementation.

The prior pretext for these changes was the change in administrative status of Singapore as a territory under British rule: from Straits Settlements to standalone Crown Colony in 1946. The **Legislative Council** of the Colony of Singapore was thus formed to replace the Legislative Council of the Straits Settlements, with Singapore becoming a Crown

Colony of its own, rather than under the now-dissolved Crown Colony of the Straits Settlements.

Crown Colonies were ruled by a Governor⁸, who was a British official appointed by the Colonial Office on the advice of the Crown to govern the colony's day-to-day affairs directly on its behalf. The Governor would in turn appoint other British officials to an Executive Council, who would at the same time be ex-officio members of the Legislative Council. The distinction between ex-officio and non-officio members were that ex-officio members were responsible directly to the Governor, rather than say the Legislative Council, while non-officio members were not.

⁸ Wrong, Hume (1923). "The Old Representative System: The Change To Crown Colony Government". Government of the West Indies. England: Oxford University Press. p. 71. ISBN 1-113-74149-X.



Members of the Legislative Council of the Colony of Singapore, 1948

Source: Parliament of Singapore

Which other members would sit on the Legislative Council, then?

Prior to 1946, the Legislative Council of the Straits Settlements comprised of the Governor and members of the Executive Council as ex-officio members, the Chief Justice, and a small proportion of local members appointed by the Governor as non-officio members, usually from the wealthier classes.

After 1946, the selection process for non-officio members was diversified after public pressure for greater representation and participation, resulting in the following composition⁹:

Ex-Officio Members of the Legislative Council (9 in total)

- Nine British officials on the Executive Council:

⁹ Singapore. Supplements to the laws of the Colony of Singapore. (1947). Singapore Legislative Council Elections Ordinance 1947 (Ord. 24 of 1947, p. 42). Singapore: Government Printing Office. Call no.: RCLOS 348.5957 SGGAS

- One Governor
- One Colonial Secretary
- One Financial Secretary
- One Attorney-General
- One Solicitor-General
- Two Directors
- Two ex-officio Commissioners

Non-Officio Members of the Legislative Council (13 in total)

- Four non-officio members appointed by the Governor
- Six non-officio members elected from constituencies
- Three non-officio members nominated by Chambers of Commerce

A total of 13 out of 22 members were appointed by the British, and an additional three members appointed by the Chambers of Commerce under the pretext of “*reflecting the importance of trade to the colony's future prosperity*”. While these three members were local, they were also in turn accountable to their business interests rather than to the interests of the electorate¹⁰. With only six members elected by locals, the number of lawmakers accountable to the interests of the electorate stood at only 27.3%. What this meant is that executive powers continued to be vested in the British rather than in local appointment holders. While the initial six elected members were soon expanded to nine in 1951 upon the

¹⁰ Report of the committee appointed by His Excellency the Governor of Singapore to make recommendations for the reconstitution of the Legislative Council of the Colony, 1946, pp. 2–5.

conferment of City status to Singapore, this still prevented local officials from being appointed to the executive branch of government.

Singapore's Political Context after The Rendel Constitution

The Rendel Constitution brought about substantial changes on two key fronts: the **changes in the electoral system** to replace the British-dominated Legislative Council with a local-dominated Legislative Assembly, in turn paving the way for an elected Council of Ministers (the equivalent of a Cabinet), and the **division of powers between the British and Singaporean leaders** within the government.



Singapore's first Council of Ministers, 1955, with Chief Minister David Marshall (second from left, front row) and Governor Sir John Nicoll (middle, front row)

Source: Parliament of Singapore

The Legislative Assembly was the successor to the Legislative Council, and this time, it was expanded to comprise of 32 members, with 25 to be elected by the local population - this

marked a nearly threefold increase in the proportion of lawmakers directly accountable to the local electorate, with 78.1% of the Assembly comprising of elected Assemblypersons, placing them in the clear majority and elevating their status. This in turn qualified the new executive branch of the government, the **Council of Ministers**, to have a majority of elected **locals** - six elected Singaporean members, three appointed British members. Power was to be shared by a **Chief Minister**, a Singaporean elected member leading the majority or largest political party in the Assembly, and the **Governor**, a British official. In turn, ministerial portfolios with purview over various areas of governance would be divided accordingly between the six Singaporean members and three British members.

As enacted by the Rendel Constitution, the Legislative Assembly and the Council of Ministers were to have the following composition:

Twenty-five Elected Members of the Legislative Assembly

- Six Elected Ministers in the Council of Ministers:
 - Two concurrent appointments
 - One Chief Minister
 - *leader of largest party or coalition in the Assembly*
 - One Deputy Chief Minister
 - *deputy leader of largest party, or leader of second largest party in the largest coalition in the Assembly*
 - Six ministerial appointments, recommended by the Chief Minister
 - One Minister for Commerce and Industry
 - One Minister for Communications and Works
 - One Minister for Education
 - One Minister for Health
 - One Minister for Labour and Welfare
 - One Minister for Local Government, Lands, and Housing
 - Nineteen ordinary Elected Members in the Legislative Assembly

Seven Non-Elected Members of the Legislative Assembly

- Three Ex-officio Ministers appointed by the Governor
 - *responsible for foreign affairs, internal security, and defence*
 - One Chief Secretary (replacing the Colonial Secretary)

- One Financial Secretary
- One Attorney-General
- Four Non-officio Members appointed by the Governor

The Governor would continue to preside over the Council of Ministers, the newly-structured executive branch of government, whereas the Speaker was to be elected by the Legislative Assembly from a list of candidates nominated by the Governor. In this arrangement, therefore, **executive powers were shared between the Governor and the Chief Minister**: six out of nine, or two-thirds, of the Council of Ministers were comprised of locals who were elected by the population, and the Governor retained a veto over issues of foreign affairs, internal security, and defence, for which the British officials within the Council continued to be responsible for¹¹.

Preparing for the Merdeka Talks: Singapore's First Elected Government

With the Rendel Constitution officially introduced, Singapore held its first general election in 1955 with a majority of seats in the legislature to be elected by locals rather than appointed by the British. The consequence of this election would have significant implications for the composition of the Merdeka Talks delegation, particularly on the Singaporean side.

In the previous two Legislative Council elections, the political party with the largest legislative presence in the Council was the British-favoured **Progressive Party**, comprised primarily of educated English-speaking professionals seeking a slow, yet incremental approach to attaining self-government for Singapore. The Progressive Party had put forward a platform built upon slowly expanding the local representation and working towards

¹¹ Singapore. Constitutional Commission Singapore. (1954). Report of the Constitutional Commission of Singapore. Singapore: Govt. Print. Off., pp. 3, 9–13, 14–19, 27. (Call no.: RCLOS 342.5957 SIN-[RFL])

complete internal self-government by 1963, and subsequently independence through merger with the Federation of Malaya with no specified deadline or time frame.

In addition, it should be remembered that in the Legislative Council previously, three seats were reserved specifically to be elected by the Chambers of Commerce. With these seats abolished, the new **Democratic Party**, comprising primarily of wealthy Chinese-speaking businessmen from the Chinese Chamber of Commerce, was formed in 1955 with a similar approach and pace towards self-government. Together, these two political parties fielded the largest number of candidates and were expected to win a majority in the new Legislative Assembly elections¹². Instead, the two right-leaning parties won less than 15% of their electoral contests.¹³

Enter the **Labour Front** and the **People's Action Party**, the two left-leaning parties who had, at that time, only sought out to form a robust opposition in the Assembly. Led respectively by the charismatic lawyers David Marshall and Lee Kuan Yew, the two parties went one step further than the Progressive Party and the Democratic Party, and campaigned on a platform of **immediate and complete self-government** through merger with Malaya and comprehensive social-democratic reforms, including the abolition of the draconian Emergency Regulations and the expansion of rights for trade unions to organize¹⁴.

Formed just a year before the elections, the People's Action Party was widely considered to be more left-wing than the Labour Front and was co-founded by Lee Kuan

¹² Yeo, K. W. (1973). Political development in Singapore, 1945–55. Singapore: Singapore University Press, pp. 99–100. (Call no.: RSING 320.95957 YEO)

¹³ Wah, Y. (1969). A Study of Three Early Political Parties in Singapore, 1945-1955. *Journal of Southeast Asian History*, 10(1), 115-141. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20067734>

¹⁴ The party manifestoes. (1955, April 2). The Straits Times, p. 1. Retrieved from <http://eresources.nlb.gov.sg/newspapers/Digitised/Article/straitstimes19550402-1.2.6>

Yew, an English-educated lawyer and legal advisor to several trade unions, and Lim Chin Siong, a Chinese-educated trade unionist. The working partnership formed between the two charismatic orators allowed the party to cultivate the strongest ties with the trade unions. While the party only fielded four candidates - far less than half the seats in the Assembly - including its heavyweight candidates Lee and Lim, it managed to win three out of four of its contests successfully, and Lee Kuan Yew would become Singapore's first de facto Leader of the Opposition in the Legislative Assembly.



From left: PAP co-founders Lim Chin Siong and Lee Kuan Yew, Chief Minister David Marshall

Source: The Straits Times, 24 Mar 2015

A clear testament to the prevailing sentiment amongst the newly-enfranchised electorate, both parties would win in more than 50% of their electoral contests. Marshall's Labour Front won a total of ten out of the seventeen seats it contested in, hence elevating it to the largest party within the newly-elected Assembly with 40% of the seats under its control. With the additional support of three elected legislators from the three-party Singapore Alliance, the

Labour Front was able to command a legislative majority and formed a **coalition government** with Marshall as the first Chief Minister of Singapore, and Abdul Hamid bin Haji Jumat from the Alliance as the first Deputy Chief Minister. In addition, **more than half of the newly-elected Legislative Assembly was in favour of immediate self-government**, with multi-party support from both government and opposition benches.

The result of the 1955 elections gave the newly-elected government a **resounding mandate from the local electorate to quicken the pace of independence**, and encouraged incoming Chief Minister David Marshall to form an all-party delegation with representatives from all political parties represented in the Assembly. It should also be noted that in the aftermath of their disappointing performance in the elections, the two elite-based parties with an incremental approach towards independence, the Progressive and Democratic Parties, decided to consolidate their electoral efforts by **merging to form the Liberal Socialist Party**. This left Singapore with four main organized political groupings after the 1955 elections: the Labour Front, the Alliance, the People's Action Party, and the Liberal Socialist Party - all of which had sent representatives in the Singapore delegation.

Political party	Seats contested	Seats won	Share
Progressive Party	22 / 25 (88%)	4 / 22 (18.2%)	16%
Democratic Party	20 / 25 (80%)	2 / 20 (10.0%)	8%
Labour Front	17 / 25 (68%)	10 / 17 (58.8%)	40%
Alliance (UMNO-MCA-MU)	5 / 25 (20%)	3 / 5 (60.0%)	12%
People's Action Party	4 / 25 (16%)	3 / 4 (75.0%)	12%

Labour Party	1 / 25 (4%)	0 / 1 (0%)	0%
Independent candidates	10 / 25 (40%)	3 / 10 (30.0%)	12%
TOTAL	79	25	

Result of the 1955 general elections for the 1st Legislative Assembly, Singapore

Source: Singapore Elections Portal (singapore-elections.com)

Both the Labour Front and the People's Action Party were social-democratic parties advocating for immediate self-government, with the former adopting an anti-communist stance and the latter (at least, as of the 1955 elections) adopting a neutral stance of neither supporting nor opposing communism. The Alliance was comprised of the Malay Union as well as two parties with close associations to their counterparts in the Federation, namely the United Malays National Organization (UMNO) and the Malayan Chinese Association (MCA). The Liberal Socialist Party retained their predecessors' incremental approach to reforms as well as towards obtaining greater autonomy and independence. All four parties were in support of eventually obtaining independence through merger with the Federation of Malaya, differing only in pace.

Delegates on the Singaporean delegation would do well to pay attention to the specific backgrounds behind their respective portfolio holders, as this would significantly inform the positions you will take during Committee sessions. The party affiliations of your respective appointment holders should play a key role in the initial Committee sessions in differentiating your positions within the Singaporean delegation, but consensus should be sought by the end of the first or second session with your delegates from other political parties in Singapore so as to present a unified set of requests to the British.

For the British, the 1955 elections was an unexpected shock: with the resounding defeat of the two parties which backed gradual self-government, and the victories of parties in favour of immediate independence, there were **considerable domestic pressures in favour of quickening the pace of extending greater autonomy** to Singapore, and this was something which **many British officials both in London and in Singapore had reservations about**. In addition, the close association between many leaders in the Labour Front and especially the People's Action Party with the mass-based trade unions became a cause of concern for the British, with the not-inaccurate perception that **sympathies for communism were on the rise** in response to the harsh working conditions in Singapore and inspired by international political developments. This gave rise to fears that a victory for these parties and full independence would pave the way to a communist takeover by insurgent elements within the trade unions.

Delegates on the British delegation would, in turn, do well to pay attention to the particular roles which your portfolio holders are appointed to within the Singapore government or within your government back home in London, and which exact aspects of governing Singapore - **external relations, internal security, defence** - are overseen by you. It would be especially important to also consider the implications that the requests of the Singaporean delegation could have on your portfolios.

At the time of the First Merdeka Talks, the British Parliament was held by the Conservative Party with a comfortable 29 seat majority¹⁵. The Prime Minister at the time was Sir Anthony Eden and having once served as a Foreign Secretary himself, saw the imperative for the United Kingdom to maintain its presence as a world power despite post-war

¹⁵ Jeppesen, C. (2017). Britain, France and the Decolonisation of Africa (A. Smith, Ed.). UCL Press.
doi:<https://doi.org/10.14324/111.9781911307730>

struggles¹⁶. His foreign policy objectives mostly pushed for the maintenance for British influence and presence in the world.

Furthermore, this was also considering the sensitive political climate of the time. The British was heavily aligned with the US-led Western bloc which held a strong anti-communist stance¹⁷. As a result, even any slight suggestion that a weak Singapore government that would be politically unable to withstand communist threats would not be looked favourably upon by the British. Given that the British were committed to the fight against communist expansion¹⁸ and wanted to especially use this period of decolonisation to install democracies in its former colonies¹⁹, it would never accept a weak Singaporean government that could potentially fall to communist rule, as it was still a real possibility as mentioned.

Finally, all delegates, and especially those on the Singaporean delegation, should be careful **not to automatically equate close ties with trade unions as being synonymous with communist influence**, and likewise should not equate the trade union movement in Singapore as being synonymous with the underground communist movement at that time. With that said, delegates should acknowledge the perceived association, especially amongst the British delegation, between the two, and address these considerations during their discussions in Committee sessions. Given the historical context whereby communist influence within the labour movement was growing, but with the two not necessarily being identical, the position

¹⁶ Pearson, J. (2003). Sir Anthony Eden and the Suez Crisis. *Sir Anthony Eden and the Suez Crisis*. Retrieved January 8, 2019, from https://www.sahistory.org.za/sites/default/files/file_uploads/jonathan_pearson_sir_anthony_eden_and_the_suez_cbook4you.org_.pdf.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Trevor Burridge (1997) Anthony Eden: A Life and Reputation, History: Reviews of New Books, 26:1, 40, DOI: [10.1080/03612759.1997.10525328](https://doi.org/10.1080/03612759.1997.10525328)

that should be taken in Committee is that there is no confirmation as to whether any delegate is officially a member of the communist organizations in Singapore.



A Merdeka independence rally at Farrer Park, 15 Aug 1955

Source: Chew Boon Chin

Possible Solutions

Marshall, chief minister at that point in time and leader of the majority party, the LF, had pledged ambitious goals for the talks - the obtainment of full self-governance for Singapore. Famously anti-colonial, Marshall's solution was to allow for the British to retain full control over Singapore's external defence, as well as her foreign policy, excluding trade, commerce and cultural relations. In the proposed **State of Singapore Act**, the document that would convert Singapore from a colony into a self-governing state, Marshall had also conceded that the British would be able to retain the power to **suspend the constitution** should there be a threat or failure of the Singapore government to give assistance for the utilisation of its external defence installations.

Singapore's biggest opposition party at that time, the **Progressive Party**, is to be credited for securing several reforms from the British before the Talks, such as establishing a Public Service Commission in 1951. A largely right-wing party, they were comprised of English-speaking upper class professionals, and their party policy of **gradual reforms** echoed

the British's stance. Lambasted for such a policy, their view was almost the polar opposite when compared to Marshall's, who was a strong anti-colonialist and had heavily advocated for rapid reforms and full self-governance.

The People's Action Party was similar to Marshall in that it was also **stauchly anti-colonial**. However, a key disparity in their solutions brought up, would be the subtle yet important nuances of PAP's non-communist stance, as against LF's strident anti-communist posture. Such a difference would thus lead to differences in opinions and viewpoints between delegates on how to deal with the communist threat emerging in Singapore.

The British were prepared only to give Singapore all the trappings of internal self-government but not the reality of power. They had offered to change Singapore's status from "colony" to "state", replace the Governor with a High Commissioner, withdraw ex-officio and nominated members and provide a fully elected 50-member Assembly and Singapore citizenship. This gave the **illusion of the power of self-determination** of Singapore, which the British quickly shattered with the conditions to such a solution. They remained adamant that **overriding legislative powers**, especially with regards to internal security, **must be retained** in the Singaporean government via the High Commissioner.²⁰ Such a policy was founded on two reasons - firstly, as Lee Kuan Yew had put, the British were "in no mood for dynamic and imaginative colonial policies" due to hostile public British opinion on this issue. Secondly, their obvious distrust in the LF government's ability to maintain law and order, let alone remain in office in the long-run, as sparked by their incompetence in containing the communist threat, explains the British's stubborn stance with regards to internal security.

²⁰ Lee, M. (2018). Merdeka talks | Infopedia. Retrieved from http://eresources.nlb.gov.sg/infopedia/articles/SIP_2018-10-17_140631.html

Furthermore, both Singaporean and British delegates considered the eventual solution of a **new constitution** that would establish an appropriate and legitimate foundation and basis for Singapore to achieve full internal-self government. What this new constitution would include, what powers and to whom these powers would confer to, and if a new constitution is even the most appropriate solution for Singapore, are questions to ponder about.

Another solution that was considered, would be a **merger with the Federation of Malaya**. However, this solution took a backseat when **geopolitical considerations**, as well as vested **personal interests** from both the Singaporean and British side, were taken into notice. The year 1956, the commencement of the first Merdeka Talks, coincided with arguably the most violent demonstration of Soviet Cold War policy where armed forces would be used to maintain Communist rule in Eastern Europe.²¹ Such a development heightened the British as well as Singapore's **fear of the spread of the communist threat** to Southeast Asia and the security risks it would bring. With China turning communist just 7 years before this, the tense Cold War background set the issue of **security as the first priority for Singapore**.

As mentioned before, Marshall was unable to prove his competence in maintaining internal security in Singapore in his poor handling and management of riots and disorder such as the Hock Lee Bus Riots. Without proper control over Singapore's military bases and a lack of trust in the incumbent LF government, such rapid decolonisation via merger would only threaten the British's hold on an anti-communist Southeast Asia. Singaporean leaders were also well aware of the fact that security was an extensive issue, and with territorial

²¹ Looking Back at the Cold War: 1956. (2016). Retrieved from <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/article/looking-back-the-cold-war-1956>

disputes ongoing with regards to Malaya's merger, it was safe to say that immediate merger without proper terms and conditions would be extremely unsafe.

The timing of such a solution, the details and conditions of this solution, as well as international advancements and domestic developments from both Singapore and the British, would thus determine the feasibility and favourability of such a solution.

Key Players

Singaporean Representatives

Labour Front (LF)

The Singapore Labour Front took the lead for the negotiations, with the Chief Minister David Marshall from the party acting as the de facto head delegate²² in the all-party delegation to London in 23 April 1956. Having just won the election in 1955 Legislative Assembly General Elections²³, the Labour Front is in the best position to lead Singapore through the attainment of internal self-rule which would mean responsibilities and powers being delegated to many members of the Labour Front.

The Labour Front delegates consisted of David Marshall, J. M. Jumabhoy, Lim Yew Hock, Seah Peng-Chuan and A. J. Braga.

Liberal Socialist Party (LSP)

The Liberal Socialist Party -- as its name suggests -- is a socially liberal party that formed as a result of the merger between the Singapore Progressive Party and the Democratic Party

²²Marshall, D. (1971). Mr. David Marshall at the opening session of the Merdeka Talks in London in 1956 - BookSG - National Library Board, Singapore. Retrieved from <http://eresources.nlb.gov.sg/printheritage/image.aspx?id=c5aa6b08-57ac-4b65-9a05-b05778e3da09>

²³ Tin Seng, L. 1955 Legislative Assembly general election | Infopedia. Retrieved from http://eresources.nlb.gov.sg/infopedia/articles/SIP_2014-07-07_134339.html

(where William Tan originated from). They opted for more conservative and gradual approaches to Singapore's self-governance as opposed to LF and PAP²⁴.

The Liberal Socialists that went to the first all-party talks in London included Lim Koon Teck, William Tan, Lim Choon Mong and Lim Cher Keng.

People's Action Party (PAP)

The People's Action Party was very supportive of the granting of internal self-governance -- and eventual independence -- to Singapore given the nature of the political involvement of its leaders and their belief in Malayan (including Singapore) independence from Britain²⁵.

The delegates of the People's Action Party that attended the first all-party delegation to London included Lee Kuan Yew and Lim Chin Siong.

United Malays National Organisation (UMNO)

In the context of the Merdeka Talks, the delegate representing the United Malays National Organisation was Abdul Hamid Bin Haji Jumat, the Deputy Chief Minister in the ruling LF-UMNO-MCA coalition. Also taking into consideration the nationalist agenda of UMNO²⁶, it

²⁴WE BACK LIM-ALL SAY IT. (1957). Retrieved from <http://eresources.nlb.gov.sg/newspapers/Digitised/Article/straitstimes19570306-1.2.2>

²⁵Sim, C. People's Action Party: Pre-independence years | Infopedia. Retrieved from http://eresources.nlb.gov.sg/infopedia/articles/SIP_2015-02-04_094340.html

²⁶Binti Mohamad, M. (2002). From Nationalism to Post-Developmentalism: The Intersection of Gender, Race and Religion in Malaysia. Retrieved from <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/46721881.pdf>

would be in the interests of UMNO to push for internal self-rule of Singapore with as less control on the British as much as possible.

Malayan Chinese Association (MCA)

In the context of the Merdeka Talks, the delegate representing the MCA was Wong Foo Nam. The MCA sought to act an umbrella representing the collective interests of the ethnic Chinese living in Malaya and Singapore. That said, the MCA was supportive of the stances of the LF and UMNO given the LF-UMNO-MCA alliance²⁷ and opted to push more aggressively for the transfer of powers from Britain to Singapore.

²⁷Singapore - Road to Independence. Retrieved from <http://countrystudies.us/singapore/10.htm>

British Representatives



The British Colonial Office, housed in the Gilbert Scott Building, circa 1880

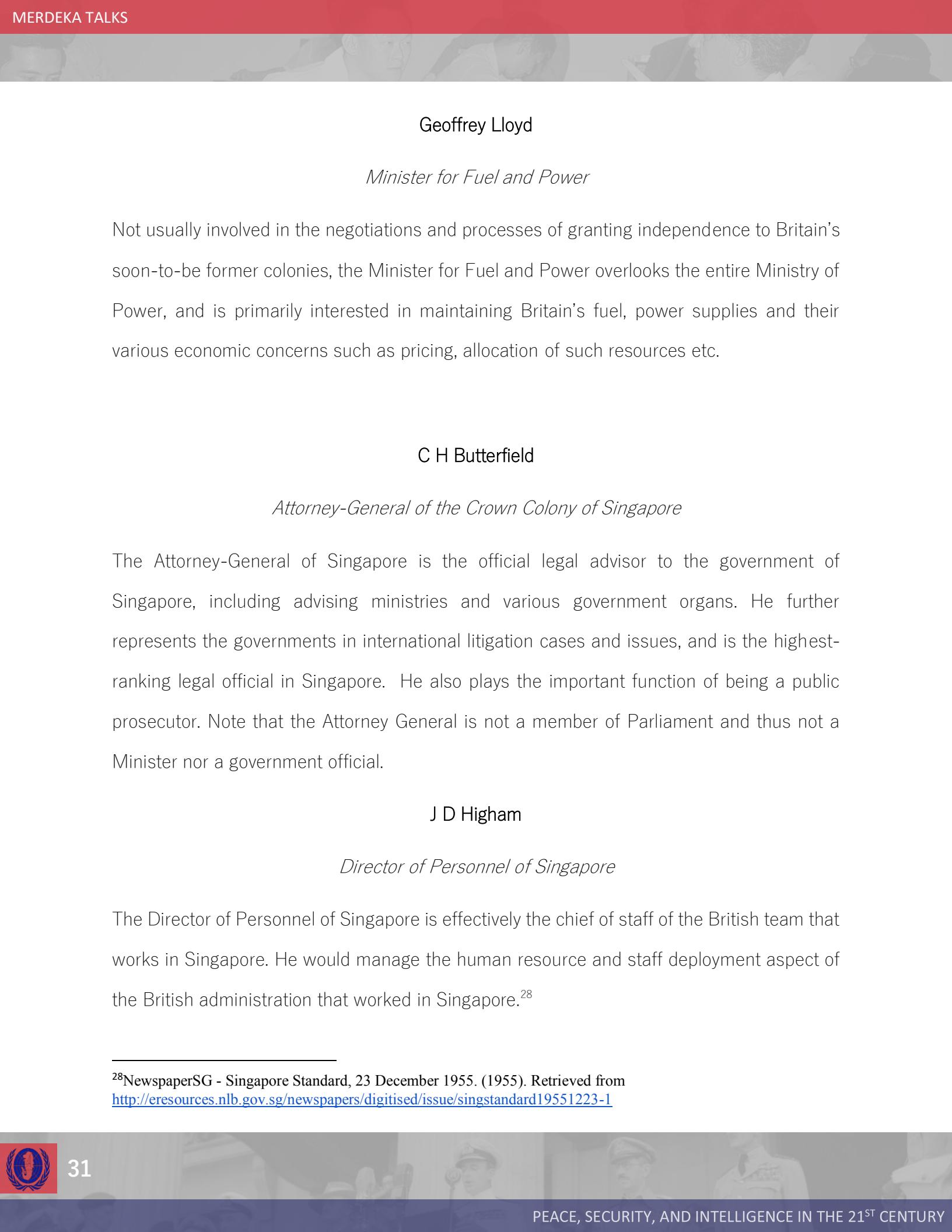
Source: History Today

Alan Lennox-Boyd

Secretary of State for the Colonies

A high-ranking government official, the Secretary of State for the Colonies, otherwise known as the Colonial Secretary, is responsible for managing the British's multiple colonies. He is the head of the British government department, the Colonial Office.

The Under-secretary of State for the Colonies is subsumed under the office of the Colonial Secretary, and thus reports to him.



Geoffrey Lloyd

Minister for Fuel and Power

Not usually involved in the negotiations and processes of granting independence to Britain's soon-to-be former colonies, the Minister for Fuel and Power overlooks the entire Ministry of Power, and is primarily interested in maintaining Britain's fuel, power supplies and their various economic concerns such as pricing, allocation of such resources etc.

C H Butterfield

Attorney-General of the Crown Colony of Singapore

The Attorney-General of Singapore is the official legal advisor to the government of Singapore, including advising ministries and various government organs. He further represents the governments in international litigation cases and issues, and is the highest-ranking legal official in Singapore. He also plays the important function of being a public prosecutor. Note that the Attorney General is not a member of Parliament and thus not a Minister nor a government official.

J D Higham

Director of Personnel of Singapore

The Director of Personnel of Singapore is effectively the chief of staff of the British team that works in Singapore. He would manage the human resource and staff deployment aspect of the British administration that worked in Singapore.²⁸

²⁸NewspaperSG - Singapore Standard, 23 December 1955. (1955). Retrieved from <http://eresources.nlb.gov.sg/newspapers/digitised/issue/singstandard19551223-1>

Robert Brown Black²⁹

Governor of Singapore

The Governor of Singapore is the de-facto political leader of Singapore during her pre-independence phase as appointed by the British. He would run Singapore on behalf of the Colonial Office, as headed by the Colonial Secretary.

William Allmond Codrington Goode

Chief Secretary of Singapore

The Chief Secretary of Singapore is a high-ranking government position, second only to the Governor. However, after the Rendel Constitution's implementation in February 1955, there was a reduction in the Chief Secretary's powers and as such, this position could be arguably be considered comparatively less powerful than the Colonial Secretary's.

Selwyn Lloyd

Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs

The Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs is a high-ranking official in the British government. Directly reporting to the Prime Minister, it is a position that functions similar to that of a

²⁹Sutherland, D. Sir Robert Black | Infopedia. Retrieved from http://eresources.nlb.gov.sg/infopedia/articles/SIP_1675_2010-06-29.html

Foreign Minister, and is considered a Great Office of State, one of the four most prestigious and senior posts in the British government.

Alec Douglas-Home

Secretary of State for Commonwealth Relations

A fairly new position, this rank was established in 1947 as more of Britain's former colonies gained independence. This role focuses on Britain's relations with her former colonies, and its responsibilities used to be subsumed under the role of the Colonial Secretary.

Alexander Lloyd

Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Colonies

A junior ministerial position, the under-secretary reports to the Colonial Secretary and a Minister of State for the Colonies. This role generally had the same responsibilities as the Colonial Secretary.

John Hare

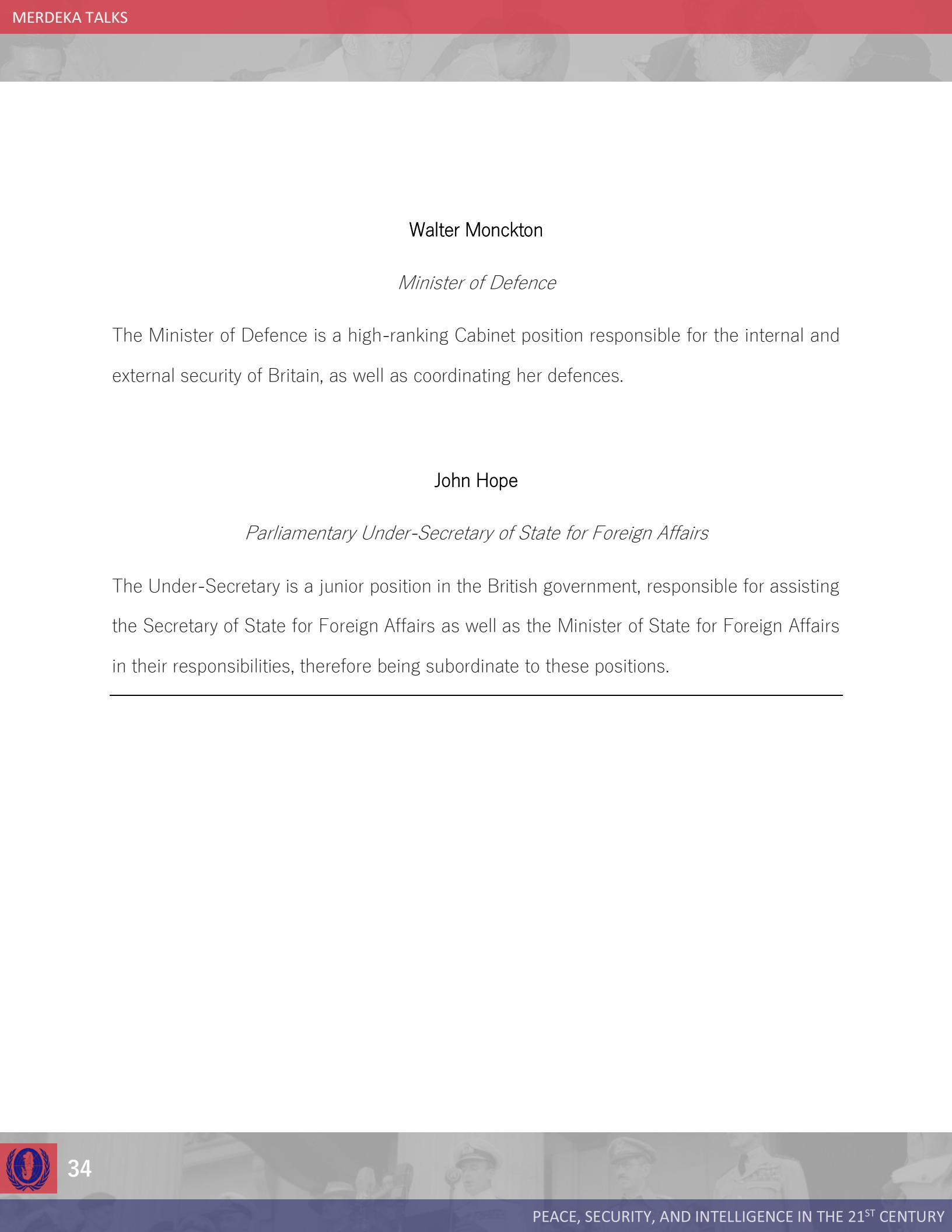
Minister of State for the Colonies

This role has the overall the same responsibilities as that of the Colonial Secretary in ensuring the smooth running of Britain's colonies, and their possible independence.

Allan Noble

Under-Secretary of State for Commonwealth Relations

Directly assisting the Secretary of State for Commonwealth Relations, this role is responsible for ensuring Britain's amicable ties with her former colonies, otherwise known as Commonwealth countries.



Walter Monckton

Minister of Defence

The Minister of Defence is a high-ranking Cabinet position responsible for the internal and external security of Britain, as well as coordinating her defences.

John Hope

Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs

The Under-Secretary is a junior position in the British government, responsible for assisting the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs as well as the Minister of State for Foreign Affairs in their responsibilities, therefore being subordinate to these positions.

Questions A Resolution Must Answer

1. What are the Singaporean portfolios that would replace the current Governor of Singapore in terms governing Singapore? What is the delegation of power?
2. How rapid would such a change take form? Is it immediate and rapid independence or gradual self-governance etc?
3. How involved would the British be in this decolonisation process? What would the relations between Singapore and Britain be after these talks?
4. What are the mechanisms in place to ensure a smooth transference of power and decolonisation process for Singapore?
5. What are the mechanisms in place for the various aspects of Singapore's governance - e.g. internal and external security, her economy etc.

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