Chapter 7 How did the Local People respond to British Rule

Essential Understandings

1. Understand that challenges shaped the character of the country

2. Understand the need for self-government in post-war Singapore

Essential Question

• Did the post-war problems expose the ineffectiveness of a foreign government?
Post War Problems

1) Shortages

- Shortage of food most urgent
- Rice producing countries did not have extra food to sell
- The war had destroyed the merchant ships and the harbour was blocked by sunken ships.
- Warehouses were also destroyed.
- Prices of food rose to about ten times before pre-war
- There was also shortage of water and disruption of electricity and communication services.
- Many of the houses were also destroyed leading to overcrowding and poor sanitary conditions.
2) Social Unhappiness

- During the Japanese Occupation, most children in Singapore did not attend school.
- Those who attended learned Japanese language & culture.
- After the war, many young people wanted to go back to school though they were overaged.
- In addition, there was another big group of children of the correct age who wanted an education.
- This became a pressing issue with the British Military Administration.
3) Communist Activities after the war

- The Malayan Communist Party (MCP) was set up in 1930 with its headquarters in Singapore.
- Communism is a socioeconomic structure that promotes the establishment of a classless, stateless society based on common ownership of the means of production.
- The MCP members felt that the British Government did not do enough to give them a better life.
- During the war the British provided arms to the MPAJA to fight against the Japanese.
- However, the MPAJA also wanted to bring Malaya and Singapore under communist rule.
- After the war, the MCP was allowed to be a lawful party.
- They decided to drive the British out by stirring up the people’s feelings against them.
a) Communist Strikes and Riots

- The Communist found it easy to stir up anti-government feelings
- People was unhappy with the shortages and the lack of jobs with very low pay
- The Communists wrote articles in the Chinese newspapers attacking the British government
- They blamed the government and incited the people to demand for higher rice rations and cheaper foodstuffs
- They encouraged workers to form trade unions to fight for better working conditions and higher pay
- 1946 & 1947 saw the communists influencing trade union leaders to organise strikes
- 1947 – ‘The Year of the Strikes’ 300 strikes 70,000 workers
b) Maria Hertogh riots

- Between ethnic Malays and the European communities
- Sparked by controversial custody battle between Maria’s adoptive Malay family and her Eurasian parents
- Photographs of a Muslim girl in a Catholic Convent and claims that she bowed down in front of the Virgin Mary statue affected religious sensitivities
- Editor of the Jawi Daily, Muslim Karim Ghani, instigated emotions by writing controversial reports and staging a 1500 strong protest
- Exhortations were made at the Sultan Mosque to wage a holy war for the return of Maria to Che Aminah
Casualties

- Mobs of Malay and Indian Muslims attacked any European and Eurasian in sight
- Set up barricades, burnt cars and houses and took over control of districts around Sultan Mosque, North Bridge Road and Jalan Besar
- 24-hour curfew imposed
- Peace regained by the British Internal Security Battlalion
- Started 11 Dec 1950, lasted 3 days with 18 killed 173 injured
- Those killed had nothing to do with the Hertogh case but was motivated more by fanaticism and racial hatred
Significance and Consequences

- The riots highlighted the insensitive way the media handled religious and racial issues in Singapore.
- British authorities failed to defuse an explosive situation where emotional reports appeared in the local press and sensational media photographs of a Muslim girl in a Catholic Convent.
- The mainly Malay Police Force appeared to be sympathetic with the Muslim rioters and displayed some measure of deliberate inaction and defection during the riots.
- Legislation against racial discrimination imposed after 1965.
- Local media exercised greater discretion in coverage of sensitive issues.
- National integration and nation-building took top priority in the formulation of government policies.
c) Anti-National Service Riots of 1954

Background

• British government did not provide for Chinese schools
• Chinese education progressed due to contributions of rich philanthropists
• Chinese schools run by members elected more for their prestige than knowledge of education
• Had strong links with communist China which therefore strongly influenced the Chinese educated community
• Highest level of Chinese language education in Singapore offered by the Chinese middle schools
Unhappiness of the Chinese community

- Under the British the English-educated were given more economic opportunities thus leaving the Chinese educated dissatisfied.
- National Service Ordinance of 1952 angered the Chinese Middle School students as they were compelled to defend the British who discriminated against them.
- The students also saw no future for them under the British as they were not treated as equals.
- The Chinese students saw no obligations to serve the British and the disruption to their education made many angry and bitter.
Description of the Riot

- 13 May 1954, 500 students marched to the Government House to lodge protest.
- Refused to disperse and Riot Squad arrived.
- Event turned violent with 20 students and 6 policemen injured. 45 students arrested.
- Thereafter 1000 students locked themselves in at Chung Cheng High School.
- 18 May 55 strong delegation protested again.
- 21 May ten boys and girls high schools closed schools early for summer vacation and affected 15000 students.
- Sparked off defiance, 2500 students locked themselves in Chung Cheng High School.
Aftermath

• The vigorous resistance made the British government postpone the National Service
• Riots awakened Chinese students’ consciousness and strengthened influence of student leaders
• Formation of the Singapore Chinese Middle School Students Union (SCMSSU)
• Use of police force aroused sympathy of the public towards the students’ cause and gave a tremendous boost to the communist activities in the Chinese Middle Schools.
• The SCMSSU grew in strength and resulted in the SCMSSU riot in 1856