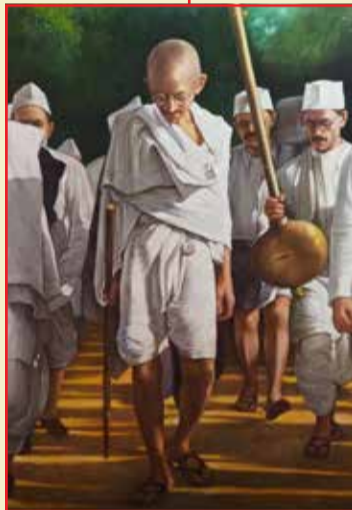# STEP BY STEP TO GE2020

Emperors rule

1819

Responsible men and women, able to work hard, raise families, build companies, start schools… but still treated like small children. This was what it meant to be a Singaporean during the Age of Empire. The British, who ruled Singapore through most of that time, said the locals weren't ready to govern themselves. Back home, the British had elections to pick their leaders. But, they didn't think the people they governed in Singapore should have that power. Under the Japanese Empire, which occupied Singapore from 1942 to1945, things were even worse.

1948

Thanks to pressure from Singaporeans, elections were organised for the first time. The elections were used to pick members of the **Legistlative** Council, which helped the British Governor to make laws. But people weren't very excited about this. Only 6 seats out of 22 were open for election! The rest were decided by the Governor or by businessmen – not by ordinary people. Furthermore, most people living in Singapore were not allowed to vote at all, because the rules at that time gave voting rights only to people born in Singapore.

A new era

1955

For the first time, ordinary people had the right to elect most (25 out of 32) of the members of the law-making body, called the Legislative Assembly. The winners would also get to serve as Chief Minister and Ministers. Previously, these jobs were done by British officials picked by the Governor. David Marshall's Labour Front party won the election and he became Chief Minister. However, even now, the British Governor was in charge overall. And defence, law, internal security and external affairs were still run by officials who had not been elected by the people. Singaporeans continued pushing for change.

SINGAPORE's independence fighters were inspired by India, which won freedom from the British in 1947 and held its first general elections in 1952. The great Mahatma Gandhi → taught Indians to get rid of foreign rulers peacefully. He showed how to hate injustice without hating the people who run an unjust system. "Ours is not a drive for power, but purely a non-violent fight for India's independence," he said. Some colonial nations had to fight wars to win their freedom from foreign rulers. Thanks to India's example, Singapore was able to remove British rule without a war.

WOMEN, PAST AND FUTURE: These statues outside the URA Building ↓ pay tribute to the Samsui women whose hard labour helped build Singapore generations ago. Despite their contributions, they did not have the right to vote until 1959. Fortunately, the Singaporean schoolgirls in the picture will get to vote and run for elections. Some countries gave men the vote first; women had to wait decades before they could vote. In 1893, New Zealand became the first country to give the vote to all adults, male or female. Singapore followed New Zealand's example.

CHERIAN GEORGE

People rule at last

1959

At last, locals could elect all members of the Legislative Assembly. No Assemblymen or Ministers were handpicked by the British. Most matters would be handled by the elected Prime Minister and his Ministers. This was called "full internal self-government", which was better than the "limited self-government" of 1955-1959. The other huge improvement was that thousands more were allowed to vote. Thanks to a new rule, people not born in Singapore could become citizens more easily. As citizens, they had the right to vote. Voters chose the PAP, making Lee Kuan Yew the first Prime Minister. However, the army and relations with other governments were still under British control. Singapore wasn't fully independent.

1963

More than 140 years of Empire control came to an end. Never again would anyone working for an empire far away decide what Singaporeans could and couldn't do. From 1963, all the important decisions would be made by locals. They would use elections to pick the people whom they trust to make important decisions. At first, from 1963 to 1965, Singapore was part of Malaysia. Like people in other large countries, Singaporeans had two levels of government: the state or local level, which dealt with Singapore matters, and the federal or central government in Kuala Lumpur, dealing with the whole of Malaysia. So, there were both state elections and federal elections.

1965

When Singapore became an independent Republic, Singaporeans had an even bigger say over their lives. They no longer had to share the government with voters in Johor, Penang, and other Malaysian states. From now, the government had only one job: to serve Singapore. The Parliament of Singapore was supreme. Made up of Singapore citizens elected by their fellow citizens, Parliament would make all the laws of the land.

1993

The general election that just finished is a Parliamentary Election, to pick Members of Parliament. Since 1993, Singaporeans have also voted in another type of national election: the Presidential Election. The President used to be appointed by Parliament. Now, qualified people offer themselves to voters as Presidential candidates. Voters can decide whom they prefer as their President. Ong Teng Cheong won the first Presidential Election in 1993. The current President, Tony Tan, won the 2011 election ↓.
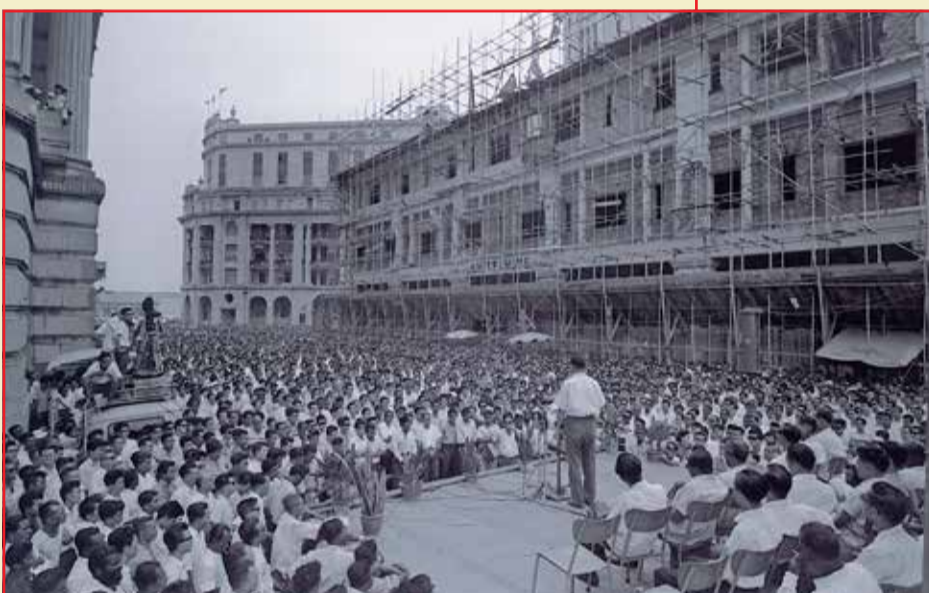

NATIONAL ARCHIVES

CHERIAN GEORGE

LEE KUAN YEW'S BIGGEST BATTLE

Lee Kuan Yew took part in elections from 1955 to 2011. In more than 50 years of fighting for people's votes polls, there was one contest that stood out in his memory. The 1963 general election was the toughest of his life, Mr Lee once told journalists. It was the first time he and the People's Action Party had to combat a group of politicians who were once their allies.

These were the **leftists** who used to be part of the PAP, fighting alongside Mr Lee. But they broke away in 1961, forming the Barisan Sosialis party to challenge the PAP. Mr Lee knew they could be formidable rivals. "We could not know until the results which way it was going to go," he recalled. "They had big mass rallies. They were very good at them."

Although the Barisan politicians were popular, Mr Lee believed their plans for Singapore would ruin the country. Mr Lee and his colleagues had to work hard to persuade voters that the PAP was better for Singapore. In the end, the PAP beat Barisan. But, Mr Lee and the PAP never forgot the lessons from their big battle with the leftists.

They realised that to win elections, a party must be well organised, just like the Barisan was. A party must also speak the same language as voters – English isn't enough when many people in the country speak Chinese and other languages. Most importantly, the PAP learnt that it must stay in touch with the people and work hard for them.

CHERIAN GEORGE

OPPOSITION RETURNS: In every general election from 1968 to 1980, the PAP won every single seat. There was not even Opposition MP in Parliament during those years. Since 1981, some Opposition MPs have won elections. Chiam See Tong was one of the most popular. He won in Potong Pasir in every election from 1984 to 2006 ←. Nowadays, most Singaporeans believe that there should be some Opposition MPs in Parliament as an alternative to the PAP.

2020

Since 1965, there have been 12 general elections in Singapore. Like most other countries, we have elections to decide how we want Singapore to be run. When we rewind the Singapore story, we can see what a long way we've come from the days when distant Empires made decisions for us. That's why, in our Pledge, we promise to "build a democratic society" – democratic elections are part of the precious heritage that earlier generations had to struggle for.