

PRIVATISATION: SINGAPORE'S EXPERIENCE IN PERSPECTIVE. By I.S. THYNNE & M. ARIFF (Ed.), [Singapore: Longmans, 1989. vii + 204pp. Hardcover: \$40.00]

THIS book is a collection of articles on privatisation in Singapore viewed from different perspectives - public administration, economic, financial management, accounting and legal. There are also articles which give an international perspective but they are somewhat disappointing as they do not attempt to draw out the implications for Singapore from the experience of other countries' efforts at privatisation. If the reader is supposed to do this himself then these articles need not be included in this collection as he could have done so by reading for instance Abromeit's article on "British Privatisation Policy" in Parliamentary Affairs than in a book on Singapore's privatisation experience.

The other articles though at time repetitious (see for instance Thynne's piece on "The Administrative State in Transition" and Asher's "Economic Perspective" where they both go through the recommendations of the Public Sector Divestment Committee) are useful particularly for those

who have not followed the privatisation debate in Singapore nor read the report of the Public Sector Divestment Committee. They point out for instance that privatisation is not just the divestment of government assets but as the Public Sector Divestment Committee identified includes “the farming out of work to the private sector”, “the switching [of] the financing of a good or service from tax revenue to consumer charges” and the liberalisation of the extent to which “the public sector monopolises certain activities through the use of its regulatory powers”. In Singapore, these other forms of privatisation though less publicised have been taking place – contracting out what the public sector used to do like the maintenance of traffic lights, the relaxation of various government regulations governing a range of business activities and the reduction of government financing for health and education. The reasons for privatisation are discussed and what is clear in the case of Singapore, is that they cannot be found in a need for budgetary revenue or in getting rid of unprofitable or inefficient firms but in the rationalisation of the public sector role in the economy and in broadening and deepening the local stock market. This rationalisation, however, need not necessarily mean that the government will or should abandon its developmental role. The different legal implications of privatising a government-linked company and a statutory board and the various ways to value what is being divested are also considered though in the latter case there is again needless repetition in the articles giving the financial management and accounting perspectives of privatisation in Singapore.

This is not a book for one hoping to find fresh insights to the privatisation debate in Singapore. It does however provide a good over-view, as the editors hope it would, of the relevant developments and associated issues of privatisation in Singapore.