

SINGAPORE GOVERNMENT PRESS STATEMENT

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TEXT OF SPEECH BY THE PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARY
TO THE MINISTRY OF LABOUR, MR. WEE TOON BOON,
ON THE DEBATE ON THE FINANCIAL POLICY OF THE
GOVERNMENT FOR 1965, IN THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
ON THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 12, 1964

We are a very fortunate people in many respects because one has only to look around in South-East Asia and see the difference. Dictatorships, guided democracies and other political gimmicks with their attendant economic decay and human suffering are the order of the times. In our context let us look back to the pre-1959 era and the post 1959 era. We will note that we were in the doldrums in the pre-1959 colonial era. Singapore was lying fallow and everything done was in the economic interests of the colonial masters but not in the social interests of the people. The post 1959 era saw the destiny of the State vested in the hands of its own people. Out of the doldrums there appeared a new dynamism, a will to improve things for ourselves. The indifference of the colonialists to social problems left in our hands a legacy of an expanding population seeking outlets for employment, housing, education, medical care. It was found that the only way to create new and expanding employment opportunities for our fast growing population was to industrialise. And so started our Economic Development Planning which has given birth to the vast Jurong Industrial Complex and the smaller estates at Tanglin Hlat, Redhill and Kallang. One hundred and thirteen firms have been awarded pioneer certificates and 47 are in production employing about 4,190 persons currently, and this number is likely to be increased to 6,687 eventually. In addition about 120 new non-pioneer firms have gone up this year alone. The next few years will see an even greater rate of industrial expansion.

Both public and private housing projects are progressing with undiminished vigour so much so that the spectre of housing shortage that faced Singapore before has disappeared. The spate of building activity is slowly changing the Singapore skyline and a further change will occur in the not too distant future with the rebuilding of the city itself.

We are now in the transitional phase of transforming the State into an industrial one which also entails social development on a large scale, and in the spirit of pioneers we must proceed with undiminished vigour so that a firm foundation for a more just and more equal society can be laid and in this society it is our fervent hope that our children will find a place of dignity and standing, happiness and prosperity. However, certain enemies of our society with the aid of their foreign allies are attempting to nullify our efforts at building a better future for our people. To them progress brought about by democratic socialism means their destruction because the people will see the hollowness of their political and social philosophy.

It is the duty of all those who believe in the democratic system to work with dedication and energy towards our economic and social development, be they employers, workers or professional men. Trade unions, of course, have a vital role to play in this field and there is no doubt that they, under the leadership of the National Trades Union Congress, will bring to the fore their ingenuity in helping to solve the social problems that face us. This, of course, means that pure militant trade unionism has no place in this context; it requires rational and responsible trade unionism in the interest

of the country. The democratic trade union movement has, however, consolidated itself in the face of challenges from the pro-Communist unions and it is now clear that the pro-Communist elements can be swiftly and effectively dealt with should they endeavour to denude and destroy our march forward towards a better life.

What democratic trade unions have achieved for the workers since Malaysia came into being is clearly reflected in the number of agreements registered in the Industrial Arbitration Court. Out of a total of 199 agreements registered, 105 were in respect of unions within the democratic fold and, further, out of 233 cases heard in the Court, 165 were in respect of democratic trade unions. Strikes, slogans and political intrigues as practised by the Barisan group of unions have not been shamefully used by them. They have made use of the Court for the very purpose that it was set up.

The democratic trade union movement has also a duty to its members and the public to keep the movement clean and honest. As in all organisations there are some in the trade union movement who tend to be dishonest. We have had recently serious allegations made against certain officials of the Singapore Manual and Mercantile Workers' Union. This has caused great concern to men of goodwill and honesty. Without clean and honest trade union leadership, the whole movement will disintegrate and the ultimate sufferers will be the workers themselves. Government has therefore appointed a one-man Commission of Inquiry to inquire into these serious allegations. The Commissioner appointed is Mr. P. Coomaraswamy, an advocate and solicitor, and the terms of reference are:

"To inquire into and examine all matters relating to the administration of the Singapore Manual and Mercantile Workers' Union up to and including the 25th October, 1964, and to report thereon with particular reference to:

- (a) allegations of corrupt practices on the part of officers of the said Union; and
- (b) disposal and custody of funds and moneys belonging to the said Union."

The Barisans have indicated publicly that they are sympathetic to Indonesia's cause and they have all along been trying to nullify our efforts to improve ourselves. We have managed to conscribe them but let us not be bedevilled by dishonesty within our own ranks because such dishonesty will only help out enemies to curb our progress. To us our future is sacred and we will surmount all difficulties to achieve our goal.

NOVEMBER 12, 1964.

(Time issued: 1850 hours)