

SPEECH BY THE MINISTER OF STATE OF DEFENCE,  
MR. WEE TOON BOON, IN MOVING THE SECOND READING  
OF THE CRIMINAL LAW (TEMPORARY PROVISIONS)  
(AMENDMENT) ACT, 1967 IN THE SINGAPORE PARLIAMENT  
ON MONDAY, 13TH MARCH, 1967.

Mr. Speaker, Sir,

I beg to move, "That the Bill be now read a second time".

This Bill seeks to repeal and re-enact with certain amendments Section 23 of the Criminal Law (Temporary Provisions) Ordinance, 1955. As stated in the Explanatory Statement the main object of the Bill is to make it unlawful for any workman engaged in the very important essential services, namely, water, gas and electricity services to go on strike at all and similarly for the employer to lock out any workmen engaged in these services. The prohibition by itself would appear to Honourable Members to be a drastic step in curtailing the rights of trade unions to go on strike, but recent experience has made it necessary for the Government to take positive measures to ensure that the public are not held to ransom by a few irresponsible elements.

Honourable Members will recall that in 1961 when the workers in the public utility services went on strike, British and Singapore Army technicians had to be brought in to man the essential services, as any failure in the water, electricity and gas supplies would not only mean a serious breakdown in the essentials of life but also result in dangerous and serious damage to public property. The inept handling of electrical machinery and water pumping equipment and explosions by air getting into the gas main can cause extensive damage and havoc to the community. Further, a strike in these essential services would mean that the overall economic situation of Singapore and its economic future would be jeopardized. No Government can allow any section of the population to cause such serious and irreparable damage to the country. As these services are part of the vital services of the country no strike will be permitted in these areas which are already designated as protected places under the security laws of Singapore. For a strike must mean that the Government has to use troops to carry out the duties of these workers, which would in fact mean the assumption of powers to break a strike through the use of uniformed personnel. Members will agree that this is highly undesirable. Government is not unsympathetic to the genuine grievances of the workers and therefore any future disputes in the public utility services will be resolved by the established machinery of negotiation, conciliation and arbitration under <sup>our</sup> industrial relations laws.

Another special feature of the Bill is that no strike or lock-out shall take place in respect of the other essential services, unless a notice is given at least 14 days before such strike or lock-out and such notice will expire at the end of 30 days from the date of the notice. The existing provisions in the law are not clear in regard to the notice period and the proposed amendments clarify the position.

As stated in the Explanatory Statement the proposed amendments provide that no strike or lock-out shall take place before the date of the strike or lock-out specified in the notice or during the pendency of certain proceedings under the Industrial Relations Ordinance, 1960. Further, the penalties for offences under Sections 26, 27 and 28 of the Ordinance have been increased and made uniform in line with the other Ordinances.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I beg to move.

MARCH 13, 1967.

Time issued 1515 hours

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