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SINGAPORE GOVERNMENT PRESS STATEMENT

SPEECH DELIVERED BY THE PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARY TO THE MINISTER FOR CULTURE, INCHE SHAARI PDIN, AT A DEBATE OF THE EMPLOYMENT BILL, IN THE PARLIAMENT ON THURSDAY, 11.7.68, AT 2.30 P.M.

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EMPLOYMENT BILL

Since the Bill was first introduced in Parliament on 15th May, many barrages have been levelled against the Government, some even accusing the Government of being anti-labour, inhuman etc. However, if we look at these criticisms more closely, we find that they are focussed mainly on the questions of hospitalisation, payments of bonus, overtime and fringe benefits. These represent only a small section of the Bill and the Government has already indicated that it would consider seriously some of the amendments put forward by the ITUC leaders.

There were interconnected factors behind this Bill: - higher GNP and creation of more jobs. It is not the intention of the Government to inflict pains on the workers by introducing this bill. With the introduction of the Bill we hope to create a favourable climate for established enterprises to expand and to attract more foreign investments into the Republic. This is as an inevitable measure to prevent our country from going down as the result of the impending British withdrawal. We can just imagine the plight of thousands of our workers thrown out of work when the British leave Singapore by the end of 1971. Not only the employees of the bases are affected but also those who provide ancillary services like domestic servants etc. The process may be likened to pulling off the main root of a plant for transplanting which will undoubtedly damage some of the root hairs. The Government task is to ensure as less damage as possible when this main root is removed. That is why these radical changes are necessary, however painful they may be.

The present leadership has never faced a greater and more crucial test in its fight for economic survival as the announcements by the British Parliament last year that it intended to withdraw all its military commitments East of Suez. During the short period discussions between the top Government officers and British personnel have taken place and these talks have been not only fruitful but paved the way for Singapore's accelerated role as an industrial nation. These trips were no pleasure trips but honest discussions between the two parties. This kind of situation calls for prompt and effective action. There is no

time for us to brood but to get down to work since our future is at stake.

This sudden flood of responsibilities thrust upon us includes that of looking for sources of revenue in order to pay for the high defence expenditure. By the end of 1971 Singapore would have its squadron of subsonic Hunter Mark Nines, flown by our own pilots, now beginning their initial training. Singapore cannot afford to carry passengers and we want our people to carry and share this burden equally together through these difficult years. Singapore being an important not only as a sea and air route because of its geographic position but the nerve-centre of SEA must and will exploit all the resources that she has in the form of human expertise and skills. By introducing this bill, we hope to be able to produce twice or three times the goods and services we have been producing now, and in return from the meaningful sacrifice made by the workers the Government expects to provide better facilities for all. We cannot afford to allow our workers to go on strikes to ask for increased wages especially at this juncture, as has happened in some countries overseas. The U.K. Government has lost millions of dollars as a result of industrial action during the last four months.

The sacrifices that we are asking our workers to make are for their own interests - not that of any particular groups of people who may want to exploit or who take undue advantage of the new provisions in the Employment Bill.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the people of Singapore will have no doubt full trust in the leadership of our Government. So, we must make realistic approaches to ensure the economic survival of Singapore. The introduction of this Bill is one way of fearlessly facing up to the problems ahead.

11TH JULY, 1968.

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