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SINGAPORE GOVERNMENT PRESS STATEMENT

SPEECH DELIVERED BY THE PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARY TO THE
MINISTER FOR CULTURE, INCHE SHARI TADIN, AT A DEBATE
OF THE EMPLOYMENT BILL, IN THE PARLIAMENT ON FRIDAY,
12.7.68, AT 2.30 P.M.

EMPLOYMENT BILL

Since this Bill was first introduced in Parliament, it has generated, understandably, a great deal of public interest and comment, some favourable, some controversial, some adverse. All this has helped us reflect further on their requirement in the best interest of our country and people in time to come. It is, however, heartening to see that there has been a general appreciation, if not acceptance, of the motivation and need for this legislation from all sectors, including labour, management and the Press. Criticisms most of them constructive, have been on aspects of detail on provisions for hospitalization, payments of bonus, overtime and fringe benefits and the like. It is further reassuring to see that the Minister for Labour has an open mind for argument and persuasion and will consider seriously necessary amendments arising out of rational review within and outside this Parliament.

May I make my observations now on the necessity and urgency for this legislation.

There were interconnected factors behind this Bill: - higher G.P. 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 a more favourable climate for established enterprises to expand and to attract more foreign investments into the Republic will be created. This is 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. Already true unemployment is reckoned to total anywhere between 52,000 and 100,000. To this will be added another estimated 100,000 people who, is calculated, will lose their jobs as a result of the withdrawal. This round figure of 100,000 is made up of 47,000 workers in the British bases, including unlisted personnel and domestic servants who will forfeit their jobs directly, plus another 53,000 people who would be directly affected by the withdrawal of service expenditure here. The service presence directly or indirectly generates

one fifth of Singapore's Gross National Product of around S\$3,200 million a year. The forces' direct spending alone accounts more than S\$400 million a year. In addition, 25,000 school-leavers enter the employment market every year. 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's 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 this short period discussions between the top Government officers led by the Prime Minister and the British personnel have taken place and these talks have been not only fruitful but helped to pave the way for Singapore's accelerated role as an industrial nation. 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 important not only as a sea and air routes because of its geographic position but also 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.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the people of Singapore trust in the leadership of our Government. We must now 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. Let us hope for the best and prepare for the worst.