

Singapore Government

PRESS RELEASE

Information Division, Ministry of Culture, City Hall, Singapore 0617 • tel: 3378191 ext. 352, 353, 354/3362207/3362271

09-1/82/07/17.

SPEECH BY MR S RAJARATNAM, SECOND DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER
(FOREIGN AFFAIRS), AT THE LONDON SCHOOL OF ECONOMICS ALUMNI
ASSOCIATION'S DINNER AT THE MANDARIN HOTEL ON 17 JULY '82 AT 8.00 PM

LEADERS OF MEN AND LEADERS OF HOGS

Ministerial sermons are generally composed with a view to raising your spirits and reinforcing your hopes that things will get better and better in every way for Singaporeans. Strangely enough such revelations, instead of transporting Singaporeans into raptures of expectations, are generally received with respectful boredom. It is not that they do not believe ministerial promises. On the contrary the listeners are bored precisely because they believe such promises.

You see for some 15 years Singaporeans have known nothing but uninterrupted progress and prosperity. So most of them take for granted that progress and prosperity is permanent, automatic; that it is an irreversible law of nature as far as Singapore is concerned.

So when a Minister waxes eloquent about bigger and better things to come, it is about as exciting and informative as the promise that the sun will rise tomorrow.

Tonight's sermon departs from this tradition. It is not about salvation but about damnation. If for 15 years we have been climbing slowly and steadily towards a heaven on earth, tonight I want to remind you that it is equally possible for you to begin a descent towards a hell-on-earth during the next 15 years or so. I would rate this probability higher with each passing year. In saying this I am not indulging in cheap shock tactics. My purpose is to alert you to a brutal fact about the life-cycle of societies, based on my understanding of history.

It is that /2.

It is that the higher a society ascends the ladder of progress and prosperity the greater the countervailing gravitational pull towards decline and collapse. In fact there is no such thing as permanent and uninterrupted advance. Most societies have after reaching their apex of achievement entered a phase of decline and reverted to the obscurity from which they had emerged.

Others disappeared without a trace.

Only a minority of societies were able to recover from setbacks and disasters through a process of change, adaptation and renewal of national will and spirit.

Part of the problem is that the decay of societies starts from within. It is the attack from within rather than from without which brings about the decay and death of societies. It begins when the majority of citizens allow prosperity and the easy life to transform them into flabby hedonists; run after prophets who promise them a heaven-on-earth without effort and without tears.

In other words whether Singapore continues to advance as it has the past 15 years or enters a period of decline culminating in its obliteration as an independent state will depend largely on the kind of leaders to whom the people of Singapore entrust their future.

There are basically two kinds of leaders - leaders of men and, what I will call, leaders of hogs. Since 1959 the affairs of Singapore were placed in the hands of leaders who treated the people as men - a term which for the purpose of my address embraces women as well.

However because of the constraints of time I do not propose to say very much tonight about leaders of men - about what makes for great leadership. All I will say is that such leaders treat the people as capable of facing up to realities and responding to great challenges; of enduring discipline and sacrifice for the betterment of themselves and their society.

The relationship between people and leaders should not be one between gullible victims and calculating confidence tricksters.

The present leadership has never hesitated to disclose to people facts however unpleasant they may be or enforce measures necessary for the general good even if they initially entailed considerable unpopularity.

My address tonight will focus attention on the kind of leadership that will bring about the decline and disappearance of an independent, prosperous Singapore. I want to talk about leaders of hogs, as distinct from leaders of men.

I want to introduce you to leaders of hogs by way of a parable for our times.

It concerns a community of farmers who were plagued by a band of wild hogs which ate up their crops and generally made a nuisance of themselves. All efforts by the farmers to trap, shoot and drive away the animals proved futile. So in desperation the farmers offered a big reward to anyone who could exterminate the hogs.

One day a stranger turned up offering to get rid of the menace. Since it was impossible for one man to cope with the problem, the farmers offered to give a helping hand.

The stranger however thanked them but insisted that he should do the job alone.

All he wanted from the farmers were some sacks of corn, a wagon and directions where to find the hogs. After these were provided the stranger drove off.

When nothing was heard from him for two months, the farmers assumed that the stranger too had been thwarted by the stubborn hogs and had returned home.

Then a few days later the stranger turned up with a wagon packed with protesting hogs. He told the farmers that the remaining hogs were all penned up in the woods for the farmers to destroy.

He then disclosed how he did it.

"First I made a clearing in the woods," he said, "Then I began by putting some corn in the centre of the clearing.

At first the hogs were cautious but after a while the bolder among them rushed out to snatch a mouthful of corn and scamper back into the underbrush.

However within a week all the hogs were not only happily guzzling the corn but were patiently waiting for me to put out the corn every day.

By the following week the hogs did not even bother to scamper back into the underbrush. All of them had stopped grubbing in the wild for acorns, roots or raiding the near-by farms for food. They knew that I would provide them with all the corn they wanted.

Having won the confidence of the hogs, I started building a fence around the enclosure, raising it a little higher each day. When the hogs could no longer scale the fence I built a doorway with a trap through which the hogs could come for their daily corn.

As they grew fat and lazy and had lost the habit of fending for themselves, the hogs now stayed in the fenced enclosure all the time.

"Today I sprung the trap and so you can finish off the hogs any time you want."

For those of you who are slow thinkers, the moral of the story is this. "Hogs which go in for free corn become easy meat for bounty hunters."

A multiplicity of causes contribute to the decline and collapse of affluent societies but if I were asked to name the most important single cause it is the yearning by people for a life of free corn. Mannah from heaven makes for a better life than making mannah yourself. So as a society becomes more affluent many people are tempted to entrust the affairs of state to men who promise free corn and other free side dishes to go with it. This is an observed fact of politics both in contemporary as well as in ancient societies. It is most pronounced in states where rulers have to depend on popular support.

In the course of my reading for this address I came across a telling example of how one of the great civilizations of antiquity was destroyed beyond recovery by the philosophy of free corn.

I refer to Ancient Rome, one of the pioneers of democracy and whose achievements are still a source of wonder and inspiration to us even today.

Starting from the Second Century B.C. Roman civilization entered a period of unbroken greatness, influence and prosperity. It became the foremost trading centre of the then civilised world. It made great advances in the arts of administration, law, architecture, the fine arts and literature; in banking, commerce and education. It set great store by meritocracy and private initiative. Taxes and tariffs were low. Anyone could come and trade freely - even non-citizens.

Yet by the Fifth Century A.D. all this had disappeared. Rome was plagued by anarchy and despair. Poverty and slavery became the lot of most of its citizens. Rome was plunged in darkness and the lights never came on again.

How and why did this happen? Of course there is no single cause for the decline and extinction of a mighty state but one principal cause was the changed idea about personal responsibility; about who was responsible for the welfare and advancement of the individual.

In the hey day of Roman glory the average Roman regarded himself as personally responsible for his livelihood; for what he and his family made of their life.

Then thanks to certain calculating politicians, the Romans were made aware of a new and more pleasant way of earning a livelihood - by exploiting the Roman state itself. Said these politicians - born leaders of hogs - that exploiting the state was a moral act since the citizens were simply robbing the rich state to provide free corn for everyone. When Romans abandoned the earlier ethics of personal responsibility and started voting into power champions of free hand-outs for the masses Rome set on the path of disintegration. For the next few centuries Rome was plagued by competing leaders of hogs whose promises grew wilder and wilder. They argued that division of wealth was a sounder and more moral kind of economics than one which gave emphasis to production of wealth which they said was gross and uncaring materialism.

In 49 B.C. Caesar, in an effort to save the economy, drastically reduced the number of Romans on the welfare register, estimated at some 350,000. However within a few years the undeserving hogs were back on the register.

State welfarism (which in its perverted form is really bribery of the citizens by scheming politicians) gathered momentum over the years.

In 274 A.D. the Emperor Aurelian wishing to provide total social welfare declared the right to relief to be not only permanent but also hereditary.

He further decreed that welfare recipients would no longer be provided, as in the past, with free wheat with which to bake their own bread. They would instead be provided with free government-baked bread. The Emperor no doubt felt that compelling citizens on welfare to bake their own bread manifested an uncaring attitude towards those who had elected to live on state charity.

He also threw in free salt, olive oil and pork for good measure.

State welfare, far from making things better for the people, only made life more difficult for everyone. Fewer and fewer economically productive people were supporting a growing army of untilling masses. Though the priests and intellectuals waxed eloquent over Roman welfarism, rampant inflation was wreaking havoc on Roman economy. In an effort to cope with this successfully Roman Emperors started debasing the Roman coin. The silver content of the Roman denarius which used to be 94 per cent was gradually reduced so that by 268 A.D. the silver content was 0.02 per cent. As a consequence prices rocketed and savings eroded. There were riots and violence. Businessmen and merchants (not state welfarism) were blamed for the sorry state of Rome's once prosperous economy.

In the year 301 A.D. the Emperor Diocletian, in an effort to control a runaway economy proclaimed his famous edict establishing comprehensive wage and price controls, enforced by a death penalty.

The ensuing chaos has been dramatically described by the historian Lactantius writing in 314 A.D. He might well be describing

conditions in /7.

conditions in modern states which went in for welfarism on a vast scale:

"After the many oppressions which he put into practice had brought about a general dearth of goods in the empire, he then set himself to regulate the prices of all vendible things. There was much bloodshed upon very slight and trifling accounts; and the people brought provisions no more to markets, since they could not get a reasonable price for them. And this increased the dearth so much that at last, after many had died by it, the law itself was laid aside."

The end came swiftly and ignominiously in 476 A.D. when primitive tribes from the north overran a now senile and decrepit city to replace the Roman Emperor with a German tribal chief. It was not that the invading barbarians were strong and better organised but simply that the Romans, once men of great vitality, pride and patriotism had been reduced by demagogic leaders into human hogs. Made effete, selfish and purged of the spirit of self-reliance and pride through years of free corn the Romans did not care whether a Roman or barbarian ruled over them.

The Romans who were once world rulers submitted like simpering slaves to barbarian yoke. This is the price a people must pay once they exchange leaders of men for leaders of hogs.

I have spent some time telling you about the outcome of state welfarism in Ancient Rome not to educate you in Roman history but to draw your attention to the fact that what happened in Ancient Rome has pointed parallels today.

Admittedly the world of Ancient Rome is vastly different from our world but the pathology of piggy leadership, of an economy of free corn is identical in both worlds. Piggy leaders end up by creating a society fit for happy pigs but which are doomed to become pork chops some day.

At the start of my address I said that the higher Singapore ascends the ladder of success and prosperity, the greater the temptation for people to turn to piggy leaders - the purveyors of a free corn economy. I think there are already some stirrings in that direction but /8.

direction but whether these stirrings will build up into something more serious will depend largely on the attitude of younger Singaporeans.

All Singaporeans under the age of, say, 40 were either not born or in their early teens when the P.A.P. assumed power in 1959. Those under 40 constitute about 70 per cent of our population and most of them have known only P.A.P. rule and more or less uninterrupted advancement and prosperity.

The older generation of Singaporeans responded to P.A.P.'s demanding and, some would say, stern leadership because their experience told them that a free-corn philosophy is a fraud. They had direct and personal experience of the frustrations and humiliations of colonial rule; many lived close to grinding poverty made real by decaying slums and putrid squatter areas. They knew that a little island with a small population and scarcely any raw materials had only a very slim chance of survival as an independent state.

So the majority of Singaporeans understood instinctively that piggy leaders would take Singapore down the road to disaster. They accepted P.A.P.'s pragmatic and unsentimental approach to politics and economics. They accepted the proposition that politics must be founded on strong leadership which gave primacy to law and order, which ruled justly and which believed that two feet-Singaporeans can be made 10 feet tall.

Economics, it maintained, was the science of production of wealth and its distribution on the basis of the contributions made by individuals towards total national wealth. It was not the science of human compassion.

This was an unsentimental approach to politics and economics. In fact one of the characteristics of P.A.P. leaders has been that they were never given to public beating of breasts and shedding of tears to signify their concern for the suffering masses.

But when all is said and done the pragmatic and unsentimental approach has done more to make life better for Singaporeans than what proponents of state welfare have been able to achieve for their people. Singaporeans are not today harassed by unemployment. They

are not plagued by endemic strikes, social violence or civil war. They do not have to go around begging for alms from wealthier nations. Singapore is one of the few countries in the world where the majority of its population can look forward to owning homes. For the vast majority the quality of life has steadily improved the past 15 years or so.

In other words unsentimental pragmatism has made life more human, more dignified and more hopeful for Singaporeans. While many countries, including advanced industrial countries, are rocked by the recession our economy so far follows a steady course. Of course none of us can escape the consequences of a full scale world slump, but given pragmatic and informed leadership, Singapore can emerge even out of a major slump, battered and shaken, perhaps, but intact and prepared to move forward when the storm subsides.

The basic secret of Singapore's success so far has been that, instead of giving free corn, the government has educated people how to grow their own corn. So long as prosperity and the good life is based on self-reliance, on consuming only what one produces, then affluence and the comfortable life need not lead to decline and decadence.

The rot sets in only when piggy leaders convince piggy people that sound economics is not the science of creating wealth but the art of redistributing it from undeserving producers to deserving parasites; that an economic policy of enjoying now and paying later is pretty sharp economics because the paying will be done by a posterity in no position to protest because it is not yet born.

So it all boils down to what kind of leadership Singaporeans, accustomed to years of progress and prosperity will turn to in the coming decades - to leaders of men or leaders of hogs.

#####