

SPEECH BY THE MINISTER FOR LOCAL GOVT., LANDS & HOUSING, ENCHE ABDUL HAMID BIN HAJI JUMAT, MOVING THE 2ND READING OF THE LOCAL GOVT. (DISTRICT COUNCILS) (CONSEQUENTIAL PROVISIONS) BILL IN THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY ON WEDNESDAY, AUG. 13, 1958.

This Bill is one of the most important pieces of legislation that has come up before this House.

It is drafted primarily to implement those of the recommendations of the Commission of Inquiry into Corrupt and Illegal or Undesirable Practices at elections which have been accepted by Government. Although the report itself was not debated by this Assembly, it formed the basis of a debate on a motion by the Hon. the Member for Tanjong Pagar at the last Assembly meeting.

It was gratifying to note then that whilst some speakers criticised the report in varying degrees, none criticised the recommendations of the report.

For 10 years now, the people of Singapore have had experience of elections, and it has become apparent during the course of these experiences that as the years go by, certain unimaginable and disruptive forces have crept into the machinery of elections. On the one hand, you have the element of corruption, thuggery and intimidation; on the other, the insidious infiltration into our lawful political arena of Communism and Communist tactics.

Though the Bill, as drafted, is designed to wipe out the former, it would inevitably lead to a lessening of the threat of the latter, for Communism cannot thrive without thuggery and intimidation.

Sir, the question before us is simple: Do we want clean elections or not? It is in our hands to decide, for what we decide today will surely affect the future of Singapore - and the future of our children. We certainly do not want their fate to be tossed about from one gang boss to another; still less do we want their future to be left in the hands of corrupt politicians.

This Bill will help to bring about a change for the better. There are actually two parts to it, although they are not so identified.

The first are amendments not connected with the Elias Report, but which Government feels should be included in the legislation for reasons which I shall enumerate.

Clause 2 of the Bill changes the date from which residence in Singapore is to be counted for the purpose of preparing registers of electors from 1st April to 1st February. This follows a similar change which has been made to the Singapore Legislative Assembly Elections Ordinance and makes it easier for those doing the work of compiling to publish both registers about the same time.

Clauses 3, 4, 6, 7, 8 and 9 of the Bill remove the mandatory provisions of the Ordinance which requires the publication in newspapers of various election notices. The publication of the notices in the form required by the Ordinance in newspapers has entailed heavy costs in advertisement charges. It is intended that for the future, a short advertisement will be inserted in the newspapers which will refer to the detailed notices in the Gazette.

Clause 5 of the Bill will make it unnecessary to undertake a revision of the register of electors in 1958 or in any year in which the register is newly prepared.

Clause 13 of the Bill amends Section 57 of the Local Government Elections Ordinance, 1957, to make it clear that although prosecutions for corrupt practices can only be instituted with the sanction of the Attorney-General, the Police may, nevertheless, take immediate action to investigate any alleged corrupt practice or to prevent the continuance of any corrupt practice.

The second part of the Bill deals primarily with the recommendations of the Commission of Inquiry.

Clause 11 of the Bill seeks to expand and simplify the provision regarding "treating." It implements the recommendation of the Commission of Inquiry that the offence of treating should be extended to include the provision of food, drink, refreshment, cigarettes or entertainment to any person for the purpose of inducing such person to attend or remain at an election meeting. (Para. 104 of the report.)

Clause 12 of the Bill implements the recommendation of the Commission of Inquiry that there should be added to the several forms of bribery under Section 56 of the Local Government Elections Ordinance, 1957, a provision making it an offence for any person to bribe any other person who is assisting or has promised to assist a candidate at an election in order to induce him not to assist that candidate. (Para. 105 of the report.)

Clause 16 of the Bill prohibits the use of motor vehicles for conveying voters to the poll. This implements the recommendations of the Commission of Inquiry as contained in para. 93 of their report. In this connection, it will be necessary to provide more polling stations so that voters will not be compelled to walk long distances to cast their votes, particularly in the rural areas.

Clause 17 implements the recommendation of the Commission of Inquiry that on Polling Day no vehicle should be permitted to carry or display anything (including any rosette or favour) which would indicate connection with any candidate or his political party. In order to make the provisions effective, a contravention of them is made seizable. (Para. 94.)

Clause 18 adds five new sections. The first section prohibits canvassing on Polling Day to implement the recommendation of the Commission of Inquiry in para. 90 of their report. The second section prohibits inter alia (a) the checking of names of persons entering polling stations and (b) loitering within 200 yds. of a polling station.

These provisions implement the recommendation of the Commission of Inquiry in paras. 98 and 99 of their report.

The third section defines election activity and prohibits any person under 21 years of age conducting any election activity. It also implements the recommendations of the Commission of Inquiry that no person should be allowed to conduct an election activity on behalf of a candidate without being appointed in writing to do so by the candidate and that the Commissioner of Police may require the cancellation of any authority given to a person by a candidate. (Paras. 101 and 102.)



The fourth section provides that an assembly of five or more persons whose intention is to disrupt an election meeting shall be an unlawful assembly. The fifth section makes it a seizable offence to operate a loudspeaker so as to interfere with the election meeting or maliciously to deface election posters. These two sections implement the recommendations of the Commission of Inquiry in para. 106 of their report.

There is one major, but controversial, recommendation not included in the Bill. That is the question of compulsory voting.

Various views have been expressed on this issue and although the Bill does not include this recommendation, Government does not wish to prevent it from being aired in this Assembly nor does Government wish to bind itself without properly sounding public opinion and weighing its pros and cons.

Sir, it is Government's intention to commit the Bill to a Select Committee, and at the appropriate time I shall beg leave to move the motion. I have already given notice of two minor amendments in Clauses 11 and 17 which will be made in Committee. There is, however, one other amendment which Government will introduce in Clause 18 of the Bill making the new Clause 73c sub-sections (1) and (2) of the Principal Ordinance seizable.

Sir, I beg to move.

AUGUST 13, 1958.

(Time issued 1415 hours)