

TRANSCRIPT OF A SPEECH MADE BY THE PRIME MINISTER,  
MR. LEE KUAN YEW, WHEN HE OPENED TRADE UNION HOUSE AND  
SINGAPORE CONFERENCE HALL AT SHENTON WAY ON  
15TH OCTOBER, 1965.

Mr. Chairman, distinguished delegates from Afro-Asian countries, friends and fellow citizens,

I would first like to recapitulate briefly what I have said in Malay and in Chinese and then go on to make a few more remarks on what I think will be the problems that will face the trade union movement in Singapore.

I said in Malay that now, with the new inhibitions, life has become a little bit more difficult. You read the papers, you feel something, your tongue is twitching to have a go; but you say, "No, you mustn't say that; it is bad. You are not supposed to interfere in other people's affairs."

And so it cause me a great deal of inhibition to read about the Forest Workers' Union demanding a little bit more pay; going to call a strike; and they had the finger wagging at them. Then someone said, "Ah, but there are special rights ... We are all "bumiputera" and so on. And other chaps then said, "Ah,

but not for trade unionists!" -- leaving unsaid what everybody knows: that it is contractors and taxis, buses and other minor capitalists and major capitalists who are included in the Special Rights clause. But these poor trade unionists were not aware that in fact there was this distinction.

Well, gentlemen, I can give you this assurance that in Singapore you will get equal misery or equal prosperity as the case may be regardless of whether you are black or brown or yellow or any of the shades in between I will go on to add that anybody who wants "special rights" had better put in some special effort for me to see. Then, we will give special rewards. It is only on this basis that we can survive and continue to thrive and prosper in the years ahead. This is an independence by ourselves that we never sought. We had fought our whole life to bring about a different situation which would provide a lasting and a permanent settlement to a problem of how to rationalise what was once run as a complete unit, as part of the British Empire in Southeast Asia. But it was not to be; at least, not for this time.

What are these problems? I was irritated, when I read all the nice words which were being said in the newspapers about how they were going to co-operate in this, that and the other when I was getting reports from my colleagues saying that they had no intention of allowing us to prosper and progress as long as

they can prevent it. They want to check our rate of growth in order that the disparity between a progressive and an open society on the one hand, and a more closed tender and a more delicate society on the other -- that the disparity between the two should not be so striking and so vivid as to shake the very foundations of the feudal system.

So, you see, what was uttered in the newspapers -- sweet words -- and what was signed when tariffs were put on our commodities were two different things. But we waited. I said nothing, I watched: perhaps, my colleagues were mistaken in their judgement of the intentions. So they also waited. But as they removed the quota, they slammed on the tariffs.

We are accustomed in Singapore to working overtime -- without claiming overtime: Ministers, permanent secretaries and the rest. They slapped the tariffs on Saturday. We worked that Saturday and Sunday, we clamped it down on Monday; and no overtime was asked for.

I say to the world: nobody owes me a living; nobody owes my countrymen a living. But we intend to bail ourselves out. We are not looking for anybody to bail us out.

As I walked into this chamber, I swelled with pride; pride at the capacity of my fellow citizens: that hall, that roof, the fittings... True, quite a lot of them, for instance, the lift in which I went up, I think, was of American design, made in Britain on patent. Alas, we have not come to that stage yet. But the way the gadgets were fitted in shows a finesse and a delicacy and pride of performance.

I have been to many conference halls. I have been to many an imposing building. But from the corner of your eye -- never mind the size of this structure -- as you walk across the floor, see whether the people have the verve and the capacity and a pride in performance.

I said just now in Chinese -- I didn't in Malay, and I hope those who did not understand Chinese will understand the significance of this -- we have got neighbours who are determined, for the time being anyway ... But never be in any way deterred by this because their determination is as long as their mood lasts; and, being what they are -- they are, by nature, changeable in moods. So, as long as they are determined, so we must be determined for other methods. And this calls for sacrifice, not least of all, from the workers.

One of the most compelling factors why we went into Malaysia was because we wanted to have the broader base so that industrialisation and capital

accumulation can take place with less sacrifice. But, it is not to be. We have got to do it the hard way.

I am giving our workers, my fellow citizens, fair warning that if we want to strive and thrust forward, then we must work as hard as the Germans and the Japanese did. They were two nations prostrate after the last war, and they pulled themselves up by their boot straps. You know the verve and the vitality of the individual German or of the individual Japanese workers. It is something. I never liked the Japanese when they came down here as conquering heroes. I had a difficult time with them and had they won for the next thousand years, it would have been "black-out" for us. Luckily they did not win. But give the enemy his due: he works.

Once, in the early '50s, I was passing through German airport having just passed through a languid one nearer the Mediterranean where the chaps were meandering around, trundling a trolley. And suddenly, over the blowers at Frankfurt, I heard the word "Achtung! Achtung!" Chaps were running around, a bit colder, a little more chilly but bustling. And it has emerged. It is there, real. Germany lost the war, but it is now more prosperous than Britain which won the war.

So, the calculations of some of those who wanted our expulsion may go very wrong. They think because we told our people to accept merger and Malaysia, that without it we will die. They are grievously wrong if they believe that. This is a people determined to survive with the will and the verve to do it. We shall strike out in new directions. How, you will find out. But you can only succeed if you are prepared to make the sacrifice.

One of the sacrifices we will have to make is that we will no longer be able to be so lax about the way our jobs are taken up by people who are really one with us. Last year, we had a net gain of over ten thousand in the exchange of Identify Cards; over 10,000 young men between the 20 to 30 age limit -- minus that job seeking group for Malaya, plus for Singapore. This amounts to 25 percent of our increase 20 to 30 years ago which was 40,000 per annum. It is now 60,000 per annum. That is a heavy load to carry and I want to give fair notice for your sake. I have discussed this with the Union leaders. In the unskilled and the semi-skilled categories, and work permit must be produced if you are not a Singapore Citizen. For the skilled: if you bring in skill, knowledge, technological capacity, from anywhere in the world, we welcome you. But if all you have are bare hands and a hungry stomach, please ask your Minister for Social Welfare in your territory to look for a job for you. We are not here to resolve other people's problems even though it hurts us to have to do this.

I would like to recapitulate this one point. The capacity to survive depends upon our ability to adjust quickly -- however painful the adjustment may be -- to a radically new and different situation.

Before we had the 11 million to buffer us and we were thinking, "Well, that will make sacrifice less painful". Now, we haven't. We have got the bare bone: two million; a small island; grit; skill; tenacity of purpose and a great accumulation of know-how.

I do not believe that either Hong Kong or Japan would have broken through into the industrial age if their workers did not pay for it at the beginning. And that was the reason why we went into Malaysia. We did not want to pay the same painful price. But there is no choice now. You have got to pay for this.

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The man who believes he can come in with nothing to learn a job, then the moment he has learnt the job the union calls a strike because the employer has just got his first contract and signed it and the dateline is deliveries by March, and a strike is scheduled to start three months before that -- that man is out. He is breaking the rules of the game which we are now formulating. And the rule of this game is survival.

This is an exercise in survival. If we do not have this resolution even if it hurts our own kith and kin, then we will not survive. Then, they will succeed in checking the momentum; in checking our rate of growth. We will then falter, and the communists will recover ground.

The human mind is not a static thing. Never believe that because we have beaten them, because we have exposed them as stooges, anti-national traitors, people who go over to Indonesia and bring in enemies to explode bombs in our midsts, that they are therefore finished; No. Their capacity for mischief is correlated to our economic growth. And when that growth goes down, the inversion is true; their capacity for mischief goes up.

And this time, it is a very different situation. The last time, there was a wicket-keeper. Those of you play the English game of cricket will know what a difference it makes when you have a wicket-keeper and a long stop. This time there is only a batsman. And if we miss that ball, it goes to the boundary line, there is no wicket-keeper; no long stop.

I am giving fair notice to friends and foes alike. And I have foes who are not Communists who are just playing opportunist. I give them fair warning.

Gentlemen, this is an exercise in survival and it calls for some very savage and brutal methods sometime. I am determined that we survive. And when we do, and we emerge, then I say those who schemed to bring us down will regret it. For as the buildings thrust upwards and the place pulsates with life and energy, so the village influence dwindles to nothingness. And one day, it will be my privilege to meet Mr. Devan Nair -- if he is still there -- to participate in what I think is the inevitable: the reunification under the different circumstances, very different conditions, of what is historically, geographically one situation, one people, one economy.

For him and me, it has been a long journey. I read his working papers today before I come .... we had three 'Cs'. This alliteration, these mnemonics help us. Three enemies -- 'Cs': Colonialism, Communism, Communalism. So, Colonialism having been pushed out, Devan Nair now added, Crooks. So, he has got Communism, Communalism and "Crookism"!

... I met him for the first time when he was in jail. This was in 1951 at St. John's Island. He was in jail, I was out. For me there was never this badge of honour. I nearly got it from our rulers who have more wisely, thought over the matter and decided to leave us alone. But nevertheless, for 9 years under the

constant risk of detention and years languishing away writing memoirs which will never be published, we fought until 1959 when the British handed over complete internal powers. And the problem then loomed large as the Communists said, "That's mine. Give me the handle and that is my foot on the accelerator". We said, "No, no. There is a slight misunderstanding. We had not agreed on this. We had agreed that the British must go out, but we had not agreed amongst ourselves what we put in their place." We said, "Democratic socialism stays". They said, "No, get out", and they nudged us in the ribs.

Well, it was a very painful experience from 1961 to 1963. Those of you who participated in that battle will bear scars in your minds for the rest of your lives. ... I am not impressed by people who talk fiercely to me after the victory has been fought and won. Battle fought, then they talk fiercely, I say, "Here, take one for the big-mouth talking." But to the man who talks fiercely, resolutely in the face of defeat or near defeat or what people thought was defeat, I say, "Here, take this for valour." And I say to Devan Nair: that was valour. There are very few who are prepared to go on -- win or lose. People are all prepared to go on when it is winning. Fortunately, now we look like winning. And we will only go on winning if there is economic growth.

But be that as it may. From 1961 to 1963 we fought and won -- versus the Communist. And from 1963 beginning with 1964 and the riots to 1965, unabated we fought the communalists. So, I am not impressed when anybody now says, "Hands up. I want to take the microphone." I will say, "Where were you then?" Why didn't I hear his voice talking about percentages and so on? It was my voice. My friends' voice -- my comrades in the PAP, in the Malaysian Solidarity Convention.

I didn't hear the Chinese Chamber of Commerce. I didn't hear these left-wing trade unions and Barisan. I thought that they went out of their way to adopt the Alliance line that all these percentage were communalism. That is what they said of me. I keep copies of them. And, now they have come out and they say, "Oh, what is the difference between 75% and 80%? It is a minor difference of 5%. "But the principle is there", says Barisan, wanting to play up Chinese chauvinism. Where was the editor when the Malay Regiment was in charge? That is what I want to know. Why did he pipe down and say, "Yes, yes. This is communalism. Why must we mention percentages?" Why echo and parrot the Alliance when their troops were marching around? Do they think because we are kinder, we are social democrats, they can take advantage of us, can intimidate us by raucous laughs and shouting; by slogan and banner and by slanging? No.

I give them fair notice. We have been through all this -- versus Colonialism up to '59, versus Communism up to '63; versus Communalism up to '65. And now, it is versus the lot of them. I don't know when it ends but I will give you one pledge -- this is not a Government or a people that will flinch at the sacrifice necessary to ensure survival. I give fair warning to all those who believe that we lack red blood corpuscles that shouting is the surest way to make us.. Shouting at us, threatening us, bludgeoning us, whether it be friend or foe .. Some of them pretend to be my friends. In fact, they stab me in the back quietly and when I turn up they bow deeply and shake my hand and say, "I am your friend". I say to them I learnt one thing fighting with the Communists against the British. There is a great deal of truth in what Mao Tse-tung says, and I used to read him in the original. I still do from time to time just to work up my phrases. He says, "Always at any one time define who is people, who is enemy." And, the definition will vary from time to time. He says for instance, in the Sino-Japanese war, the enemy was Japanese and all those who fought Japanese were "people", therefore friends. So, the KMT were also friends. Then the phase after the war? Who is the enemy? The KMT is enemy. Who are people? All those who fight KMT are people. By this definition, at any one time, you know you are fighting only one chap. It was a lesson I never forgot fighting with the Communist: that at any one time, they chose one chap. If you start fighting three

chaps at one time you are likely to get mixed up. And three people going for you at the same time may be unpleasant business.

We have finished three stages. With the Communist and the Communalist, we fought the British. ... One "C" disposed off, we could have fought all the two other "Cs". But at that time I said, No, no, this is a very foolish thing. Why fight the Communalist and the Communist at the same time? We get the Communalist with us to down the Communist first. So, we settled the Communist. Then the communalist reared his head, and we said, "Now we fight the Communalist." Never mind the communist. We ignored him for two years, we ignored him completely. He was barking and yelping at our heels, wanting a united front. We said, "No, no. If you want, you just follow me. Fight him." And thereby, lies a tale. Who is foe now?

There are several foes; but to succeed, we fight only one. Don't fight them all: you will complicate things it makes it difficult. We will decide after we have done all our calculations which is the more dangerous to our survival and we fight that one foe and mobilise all resources to down that one. And, of course, having "downed" that one, you can be sure the others will pop us again. That is the whole business of life.

But I like a clear distinction made between friends and foes. Now, in my way of life, in my way of thinking, there is a clear distinction between friend and foe. With a friend, we have our arguments, we have our fights but we never "down" each other. We never denigrate our own beliefs, our own creations, our own movement. Whether it is amongst the communist or whether it is amongst social democrats or democratic socialists, there are always people who turn rogue. Like the dog which has got rabies, some human beings too, get bitten by the rabies. They think they are very clever; that they can use the Government and puff themselves up, then they can stab the Government, smile at the Government, shake its hands and says, "Puff me up some more".

Well, I say to them that he who denigrates what was his own movement does not deserve to be classified amongst friends. And once we decide that the man has crossed the line that divides friends from foes, he must be prepared to fight to the finish. That is the problem of survival.

But for this evening, may I say what a singular privilege it has been to have been closely associated with the Secretary-General of the NTUC for all these years. I know men; I know them when they have got guts and I know them when they haven't. And I say he has got guts.

He has been jail twice. He may yet go in for more times. He is no fool and he knows the British jails are different from other jails. In British jails, your diet is gazetted. There is a Government Gazette ... And we still honour it you know -- two eggs, ¼ lb. butter, ½ lb. meat, vegetables, and if he doesn't get books to read, we create a big fuss outside. So, books are sent in, writing paper and all. In some jails, the regulations, are lost. That is a very painful business. And you are never quite sure whether, together with the ingredients that make the curry, some other deleterious powder has not been added. It is in the knowledge of all this.

A foolhardy man does not necessarily deserve a medal for valour. It is when a man knows that the odds are, and he says, "Notwithstanding that, I must do so", that is valour. The NTUC must find such another man. Because he has a job to do and he doesn't flinch from it.

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And I say to those within our ranks: that if they take us on, they take us on to the finish -- something which the Communists know. I learnt that from them. That if they win I die; but if I win; they live. It is an unequal deterrent. But they know, of course, that if I win they won't live as happily and comfortably as when they win. But nevertheless, the fact remains that if we lose, we die.

And I give you a solemn pledge which I have not the slightest intention of fighting this battle to lose. I fight to win. It is on that basis that I look forward to co-operation and verve from the NTUC and from the organised working-class movement in Singapore.

Thank you.

15th October, 1965.

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