

BROADCAST EXCERPTS FROM AN ADDRESS GIVEN BY
THE PRIME MINISTER, MR. LEE KUAN YEW, ON
"CHANGING VALUES IN A SHRINKING WORLD" AT
THE POLITICAL STUDY CENTRE ON 13TH JULY, 1966.

Broadcast: 18th July 1966 at 10 p.m.

The topic of my discussion this evening is a thought which struck me throughout my recent journey: the problem of changing values in a shrinking world.

How quickly ideas have moved not just in our midst but all around us.

In the last 15 years, two of the cardinal axioms of the international scene have disappeared, axioms on which everybody made his prognosis of the future. The first axiom was of a monolithic Communist world, ever-growing and ever-expanding -- a solid, monolithic force. And, that is no longer true.

Equally so, it is no longer true that Afro-Asian solidarity -- the unity, the sense of togetherness -- of all the subject peoples who suffered at the hands of White European colonizers would last for a long time and provide a rallying

force on a broad world-scale against the former colonial powers. Too quickly have people become disillusioned and discovered that with the end of European empires, you do not go back to an idyllic, romantic past where all was happy and all was well before the white man came and colonised. In fact, there was much feuding, intriguing and a constant process of contest for power between tribes, between nation-groups.

I was impressed, most of all, by this one thought: that there is no danger of it ever being said in the last third of the 20th century that we have become frozen in our past. This is very important.

It has been said of many of the leaders in Asia, particularly of the Indians who led the anti-colonial revolution, that they were steeped in ideas 30 to 40 years before their time. When they were students in Europe, they imbibed a few ideas -- basic radicalism -- and whilst the world moved on their ideas, their basic references stayed put. And so it was that the Indian Congress Government attempted to implement the philosophy, the ideas, the political theories of what democratic socialism espoused in the early 1920 or even before the first World War, when Nehru and his generation were being educated in Europe.

But now, with constant travel -- you can take your breakfast in Singapore and have your dinner in London -- there is no danger of that happening.

And hence, I have chosen as my talking-point, "Changing values in a shrinking world".

I had never been to Eastern Europe before. I had vague ideas of what it was from my student days listening to the tales of fellow students who had gone to Communist countries for youth festivals. They always came back with the most stupendous stories. I didn't go there, and probably one of the reasons why I am here today is because I did not make such an unnecessary excursion! But, I had a fairly accurate idea of what the Western commentators think of Eastern Europe before I got there. But, what was interesting was to find how much of the contemporary world Eastern Europe is.

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There is none of the rigidity of the Stalin era and there is a lot of 'aliveness' and ferment. What struck me most was that that the same ferment was going on amongst the West European countries many of whose left-wing leaders I had the opportunity to meet and talk to for about a week in Stockholm before I journeyed on.

I am not saying what has been expounded in a very facile way as "the world is moving towards a common point". You know, the theory that the Communists are becoming less rigid, becoming more pragmatic, decentralising and handing over power to their technocrats and their managerial class -- the "meritocracy" -- as against the part stalwarts. This is the pressure of modern techniques of production which makes it necessary. At the same time, the Poles are getting more democratic; the Czechs are doing some heart-searching; the Hungarians have gone through a lot of problems and are trying to build a less Russian-type society.

On the other hand, you have your West European democratic socialist groups moving away from the doctrinaire policies and beliefs of the early 1920s and 1930s -- even of the early 1940s and the late '40s -- and moving towards a more incentive-based system.

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And, right at the other end of the spectrum, are the Americans who are supposed to be the most wicked of all the capitalists. But even they talk of "Medicare" and some form of state responsibility for basic needs like health and housing and so on.

But, I would like this evening, if I may, to think aloud. How much of this is the result of changes of techniques of production which require certain forms to be followed if you are to exploit these new techniques of production for the things that the human being requires; and how much of it really, is basic philosophy.

There is first, the realisation that nobody knows really -- not even the topmost men in these countries -- what the world will be at the end of this century. Nobody can say because first, you cannot evaluate or give correctly, the right valuation to each factor which is at play in influencing events; and, secondly, nobody really knows what new factors may enter the situation and change the course of events.

Take the monolithic Communist world. Who would have said ten years ago in 1956, that, in fact, the first beginnings of a split in this monolithic structure -- the ever-expanding, completely unified Communist world -- was going to come asunder? And, come asunder it has. Nobody pretends that there are no problems. Everybody pays lip-service to the principles of Communism and the solidarity of the socialist camp.

But, what is interesting is this: each is a nation-group with a nation-interest. They are all Communists -- and let there be no mistake about it: they believe in the doctrine. But the doctrine has not been able to resolve the eternal conflicts of race, culture, religion, history. They understand the dogma, the doctrine, the vocabulary. But the starting-point is : where do I go from here? And, of course, where does the world go ? But, the attitude is: the world is of interest insofar as I have a reasonable place under the sun -- which is a very far cry from what the starry-eyed Communists that I met in my youth in London and subsequently here, believe Communism to be -- although even with them, it is slowly percolating that the monolithic structure really is gone.

The other pillar which has disappeared and to which, I think, we must get accustomed, is Afro-Asian solidarity.

Nobody really believes any more that the black, brown, yellow -- all the coloured peoples of the world -- belong to one band and that their whole purpose in this next stage of human evolution is to square their accounts of all the injustices done in the past. Only too acutely are they conscious that the moment European powers are removed, the old indigenous forces that had bidden for power come back into play. And nowhere is this more apparent than in the relationship of Cambodia and Thailand.

I am a friend of both the Cambodians and of the Thais, and I hope it will be possible -- because we are, at least, one neighbour removed -- to be able to maintain this position.

The strangest thing about countries is: your best friends are never your immediate neighbour! It gets too close and your neighbour's hedge grows and infringes on your part of the garden and the branch of his fruit tree covers your grass and your roses do not get enough sunshine and so many things happen! And therefore our best friends, as has happened with so many other countries, are those who are farther afield and with whom we can talk objectively.

I have made this comment before, and I think this is worth remembering.

There are countries in Asia which are new, which had never existed before in this form and shape. But there are countries whose entity goes back to hundreds of years. And it is so with the Cambodians, with the Thais and with the Burmese.

There is Afro-Asian solidarity yes, on certain limited issues like South Rhodesia -- down with the white man, he is a vicious chap, he keeps the black man down -- and like South Africa.

But how does Afro-Asian solidarity resolve problems between Cambodia and Thailand or the problem of Arab unity? There has been ten years -- and more years of this. And nobody really believes that you can go back to Bandung in 1955. That was the highwater-mark of that age and it is finished. These are changing values -- just like styles, you know. It is as if you suddenly realise that a style is not good, that it doesn't work and is not comfortable.

What I would like to try and assess is: what does this mean for us? How does this affect our eternal interests?

If we were still in that early fervent anti-colonial era of "Down with Western bases; Western bases keep coloured peoples down" -- then this would immediately present us with a grave problem. And we have been able to ride this problem partly because nobody doubts that, in fact, if we had our own will and we could afford it, we would have none of western bases. Who wants western bases? That is the first point why nobody says, "You are a colonial stooge."

They accept that point.

The other point is: everybody is quite resigned to the fact that when you have a power vacuum, new powers contest for supremacy. It is understood. If you remove British bases who else will contest? If you remove British and

American influence -- the American from South Vietnam, British from Malaysia and Singapore -- do you think we all are going to fall on each other's neck and kiss each other on both sides of the cheek? There are very few illusions left about this.

And this, in my assessment, has helped us tremendously: the fact that everybody is beginning to understand that there - is no such thing as a pre-destined point to which evolution will go. Nobody really knows -- because so many factors are involved -- just what all this is going to lead to. Not even the Russians, not even the best of the whiz bids in Washington. They really do not know.

If you ask them, "Look, what is going to happen in Vietnam? You tell me now, spell out step by step, where you think all this will end" -- and I do not think they can really spell it out to you and say, "Well, in the year X -- which is three years or five years from now -- we shall have accomplished this and so many years from thence, we will have accomplished that ..."

They are playing on the basis that certain factors are in a process of flux and change. Whatever happens, they cannot withdraw. Something is happening in China which may have immense repercussions in the next few years on the

shape of things to come, not just in Asia but throughout the world. So they hang on and don't give up: "Let's wait and see; clog it out; test it, step by step; probe it."

I think the statement which impressed me most was one which one Prime Minister made. I said to him: "Of course you know that this is the age of big powers, super powers ... In the 19th century, power resided in a group of relatively small states whose wealth and resources were derived from outside, from their empires outside. They had taken the first few steps in the industrial revolution -- Britain, France, the Dutch, the Germans -- and because of their industrial revolution, their technological superiority together with the fact that the major means of communication was the sea in that era, they were able to exploit the resources of their colonial world, Asia and Africa and the new world.

Today, the developments which have come about in communications and technology have shifted the balance. The big powers are those who have huge land masses with good communications: the United States of America, Russia, China.

Your medium-size European powers of 50 million, 60 million no longer count in the contest for world supremacy, and they themselves are thinking in terms of clubbing together to be able to count as one unit.

These are your new techniques of production. You can have the best designers for your aircraft. But, have you the resources to carry it through from the idea stage to the planning stage, to the production stage and to sell enough of it, to make enough of it? Is your home market big enough, to begin with? the Russians have a big enough home market, the Americans have and one day, the Chinese will have, too. They can start making an Ilyushin and immediately 50 percent of production is meant for home consumption.

You do not produce many such aircraft. 50% of the Boeing 707 are used within America for just flying people within their own continent. You can't sell Comets or VC-10 to them. They block you on the tariff barrier. Political autarchy is a privilege only for the really big.

So I said to this gentleman, "You know, the European countries -- whether you are Western Europe or Eastern Europe -- you are too small in this. This is really, modern means of production, and a matter of economies of scale. If you have one big machine to make aircraft, you can make hundreds of aircraft. But if

you can only sell five or six, then you have lost money; you have had it." He replied "Yes, that is true." And I said, "You know, there is a lot of talk about the British going in with the French and the Germans into this Western European Common Market which will eventually, probably be a Western European Federation which collectively might have as much a say on the events of the world as the Russians or the Americans." And he said, "Yes, and why not?" he said. And he added, "Such a Common Market should extend right up to the Urals," fully conscious of his need -- if he is to emerge -- to diversify his links because he is caught in Middle Europe, and whatever he wants to do, there are the limitations of space and numbers. This is his growing realisation.

What does it all means for us?

First, fortunately for us, we have some years in which to strengthen our own position and in which we hope some of our neighbours will have a better assessment of their long-term prospects.

If in 1963, you had told the Indonesians that confrontation would bring hardship, unhappiness and misery, they would have said, "Because we are hurting, that is why you are bleating." But they are, in 1966, on their own, saying "Yes, confrontation has crippled our economy." Their cost of living has gone up

a few hundred-fold since, calculated in their rupiahs. And, in the first four months of this year -- according to the Financial Times -- the prices of goods have quadrupled; just January to April.

There is a growing realisation throughout, whether in Afro-Asia, whether in Western Europe or in Eastern Europe, that economics and politics are closely inter-related. And good economics must be the basis of good politics. This is a sinking realisation but which, I think, helps us.

There is no love lost between the British and the French as a people, and even more so, as two governments. But they are, in collaboration, going to build a tunnel to link up. There is no friendship involved in this. It is just hard, economic facts. If you can transport goods from your place to my place cheaply, then economies of scale make it such that you are bound to benefit and I am bound to benefit; we exchange. That was the first beginning of man's civilizations, wasn't it?

So what we have to do really, is to be patient without giving anything fundamental away. We have to be patient and hope for the penny to drop: the realisation of the mechanics of all this.

I have been at pains trying to explain politely that if tomorrow we dropped the hydrogen bomb and blew up the foundations of Singapore and then towed it out into the South Pacific, the effect on us may probably be not as great as the effect on our immediate neighbours. It would not be the same place because a sparking-plug has been taken out. Is this been achieved out of nothing? What is it that creates it -- the things that human beings want? What does it require? Organisation, technique, skills, human effort. Do you think by destroying this, you will increase your welfare and your well-being? I don't think so.

My first expectation is: given time, provided nothing fundamental, nothing of principle is given away, this realisation must come.

Meanwhile, we also must never believe that the happy situation we are in will go on for ever, that the Americans consider South Vietnam fundamental to their prestige and to the security of the whole of Southeast Asia, and that the British are a necessary back-stop in the region from allowing the whole area to be undermined militarily and otherwise and that therefore, they will just do this for ever and ever.

First, we must never assume that they want to do this for ever and ever. They tell you now they want to do this for ever and ever. But there may come a

time when their mood may also change and they may say, "No, no, this is not in my interest." If you get a shift, a major shift of policy after the present struggles in China, the whole spectrum may change. South Vietnam no longer becomes important. New forms to secure big-power interests can be arrived at, and big-power interests do not necessarily coincide with your and my interests. At the present moment, it so happens that there is a coincidence of interests. But we must not assume that this can go on for ever more. You might get into a situation where big-power interests make it irrelevant whether or not we are engulfed in a bigger whole, and that is the only circumstance in which we can be engulfed in a bigger whole. And in that contingency, we must have the capacity to make it extremely painful and expensive for ever after because history is an unending process.

It requires first, no closing of the options. There are a series of possibilities which could happen in the next 10, 15, 20 years. In none of these possibilities must we foreclose and say, "I abjure this particular alternative." The whole position will have to be reviewed probably by a new generation of leaders when the time comes. But it is not for us to close these options. And in fact, it is our duty to consolidate, to make quite sure that more options are at our disposal. And, never believe that because you have a geographically small area and a numerically limited number of people, that we therefore do not count.

History has not been made that way. There are any number of very small states but which because mainly of the quality of human organisation vis-a-vis their neighbours and secondly, by the accident of geography, have played very key roles in the development of the whole region.

For the next one, two or perhaps three years, this will be the burden of my message: we must learn to adapt, to adjust. The world is changing, values are changing, the basic assumptions on which all these prognostications have been made are constantly undergoing shifts in evaluation of the factors involved.

Singapore cannot live just on the basis of doing what it did before. That is not good enough. The things we did which have secured our position between the 1950's up till now will not be enough. What did we do? Eradicated injustices. We gave a stake to everybody so that he now begins to feel this is his home, this is his country and he is prepared to fight for it. He doesn't riot any more. If a riot takes place, he runs downstairs and takes his scooter which is on hire-purchase and carries it upstairs to his flat in case the scooter gets destroyed before the hire purchase is even paid up. But that this is not good enough, just building more flats, more schools, more hospitals. We must keep on doing that, but we also improve.

I tell you the things which we must do. They trouble me. A population which is good at the acquisition of wealth -- which this community is -- is necessarily a selfish one, and it is. Let us make no bones about. We are talking amongst ourselves. Your forefathers and my forefathers came here in order to make their fortune, and they worked hard for it. They had that spirit of adventure. 95 to 98 percent of Singapore's people came from outside.

What brought them here? There must be something above average, isn't it? Pressure of home conditions, and a desire to try one's luck in new fields, in new pastures.

In that situation, there was a free-for-all. You had your clan association to buffer you against unemployment and sickness. The Government did the minimum. Therefore, there were Chinese clan associations, Indian Kerala something or the other, this, that and the other. All these were meant really, just as the minimum buffer for what a government did not do. But every man was out for himself. This is the dominant characteristic of Singapore. And, this must be changed.

And, this is a change between a trading migrant community to a rooted community which is in a hazardous region. Can you make that change in attitudes and values?

Your incentives, your motivations must change because the situation with which you are confronted has changed. And I would like to believe that in the next five years... I think we have five reasonably secure years. For a diversity of reasons, the less I enumerate what the reasons are, the soldier the five years will be But the next five years, perhaps ten years are reasonably secure.

There are however, vast changes taking place -- changes in values, in concepts -- that affect us. Because they not only affect the mood and the style of doing things; they also affect the projection-planning of the super-powers who are interested, in the last resort, mainly in their super-power interests and, of course, the general welfare and happiness of mankind -- if that is also achievable. But, if that is not achievable, then the general happiness and welfare of their super-nationals.

How do we ensure our interests are not prejudiced in this situation?

I would say -- calculating backwards and forwards, 11 months on an independence which we never sought -- that our best chances lie in a very tightly-organised society. There is no other way.

Many other small societies like ours have survived. Because they are so much better organised, they have a contribution to make to the general welfare of the whole area....

The second important objective which we must achieve is an ability to mobilise the maximum that we are capable of. Societies like ours have no fact to spare. They are either lean and healthy or they die. You have not got much to spare. If you run a large army, you will run yourself bankrupt. We have calculated backwards and forwards. If you do not have an army, you will always be exposed to perils one of these days when bases are run down and many problems arise.

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How have other people done it in other parts of the world? You calculate and you say, "This is the way it can be done." And this means new values. And that is the whole purpose of life! He who survives is the man who is able to adapt to changing situations.

But in the end, it really amounts to this: nobody is in a position to say for sure what could happen by the end of this century. Who knows what factors will come into play? But, what is definitely certain is that those found in our situation, with higher standards of life in a tightly-organised, economic community like Singapore, who do not at the same time acquire the capacity to stand up for themselves soon, on their own if needs be, that they must perish. It is as simple as that.

I do not believe we will perish. Because there is that the animus in new societies. And ours is a new society -- as with the Americans, the Australians. They are new societies. There is a dynamism about a new society. This is one of my most vivid impressions.

How much of the debris of history rests over Europe... They are caught by all the phobias of the past -- past invasions, past attitudes repeated as a result of past unhappiness. The Poles keep on thinking of the Germans; the Czechs keep on thinking of the Germans; the Hungarians, a bit far removed, are thinking of the Austrians and are also having a chary eye generally at other neighbours too, some of them deemed to be in the 'friendly' category. And what was most significant was the tenacity with which people held on to their past.

The lesson of all this is: those societies survive and prosper who are able to make the adjustments to meet the changed circumstances in which they find themselves. That really is the challenge for Singapore.

One year ago we were under completely different circumstances. I do not know whether it would have been better if we are still in Malaysia. But that is so much argument. We are out of Malaysia. This is our situation, these are our assets. And I say we exploit them to the maximum and gear our people for these changed circumstances in order that our responses can be equal to the challenge.

And my assessment is that we have about five to ten years, the options will have closed and when the time comes that you are weak and feeble, then you have to take what others dispense to you. But if you are not weak, you are not enfeebled, then you are in a position to use, to a very considerable extent, the various forces which are at work in this area, and which will be at work ten years from now.

There is a manoeuvrability and a flexibility which can ensure not only our survival because I do not think if we consolidate in these ten years, that survival is a question at all. The question is -- how well can we survive?

What future our offspring will have here really depends upon how quickly we can adjust to these new circumstances.

The human being is a creature of habit in his values. He learns, he reacts, he responds. But there are some habits which must change, which will not help us. By all means, strive; by all means, be successfully; by all means, make a success of your life which is natural, particularly in a young migrant community. But, are we fully conscious that the situation around us is changing inevitably as to require that we be in a position to do certain things for ourselves?

If we cannot, if we develop a "soft" society, then we cannot survive. If you are easily rattled and panicked and it is manifest to others who are interested that this is a population that can be rattled, that can be panicked, then the options at my disposal are limited. If people know that if they do certain things, the population will quake, then life becomes very difficult. But, if they know that this is a pretty rugged population -- not just the leadership but the population -- and that you cannot just threaten but that will have to be carried out with payment of a heavy price, then my options immediately widen.

What is required is a rugged, resolute, highly trained, highly disciplined community. You create such a community, and you will survive and prosper

here for thousands of years. This is a lesson which other nations have learnt and which I hope we will learn in time.

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