

TEXT OF SPEECH BY SINGAPORE'S CHIEF MINISTER
MR. DAVID MARSHALL, OVER RADIO MALAYA TONIGHT
(MAY 28) AT 9.45 P.M. TO THE PEOPLE OF SINGAPORE.

Information File

People of Singapore:

The high hopes with which you sent your merdeka delegation to London are now like a dead bird at your feet. I speak to you as the leader of the delegation which failed. The Singapore newspapers have published extraordinarily accurate descriptions of what took place at the secret conferences, at the private meetings of the delegation and even at the meetings of individual parties.

I understand that many people in Singapore have blamed me as being mainly responsible for the failure of the mission. It is true that I struggled strenuously and continuously against the acceptance of an agreement that I considered would tie Singapore to an unhealthy constitution. It is my belief that it is better to have nothing today than to tie ourselves for years to something that is quite inadequate for a self-respecting people. There are persons within the delegation who disagreed. There are some who believed that what the British offered is good and sufficient for an indefinite transitional period. There are others who advised that it is better to accept something than to return empty handed. I shall be reporting fully to the Assembly. The truth of my actions throughout the conference is known to all parties, including the Opposition. They will have the full opportunity to condemn me if they so desire. I understand that, in the disappointment of failure, there are many groups that want my head. I myself honestly believe that my actions were absolutely right and I am prepared to face in the open those who condemn.

There has been a suggestion that these deep differences within the delegation and the bitterness of the wrangling behind the scenes, which were known to the Colonial Office, were responsible for the failure of the talks. Let me assure you that I am satisfied that, even if our delegation were as united as the Federation delegation, we would not have got more from the Colonial Office.

The approach of the Colonial Office was inspired by a feeling of weakness accentuated by the threat of Ceylon to end the facilities for the British Naval Base there. The attitude of the Colonial Office is: we need Singapore now more than ever for our military purposes, and so long as we need Singapore we must control Singapore completely. The interests of the people of Singapore must give way to our interests. This is a dangerous approach, as I tried to point it out to them - dangerous to them as well to us.

Our approach was totally different. We said the people of Singapore have as much right to human equality as the British people - this comes first. We recognised, however, that the British people believe they have strategic interests in Singapore vital for their survival, and we, as a free people, are prepared to co-operate in partnership with them for the maintenance of their interests. We asked for dominion status, the equal of other nations. We agreed to remain in the sterling area. We agreed that the British Government should have all the facilities for naval, air and land bases in Singapore. We offered

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ON PAGE 1.

It is not for me to praise the loyal support of my colleagues but I would like to mention the magnificent conduct of one member of the opposition - Mr. Lim Cher Keng.

He displayed a deep and genuine urge for the welfare of Singapore, transcending personal and party constitutions, impressing the whole delegation. He was a very real help in maintaining the unity of the delegation.

On your behalf I thank this true patriot for his sincerity and his courage.

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happened in Ceylon. a defence and security council consisting of equal representations from Singapore and the United Kingdom which would iron out any differences that might arise in respect of the interpretation of the rights of the United Kingdom. The Colonial Office was not satisfied. They said that a treaty giving Britain these rights could be abrogated by the next Singapore Government. We agreed that these rights should be retained in the act of Parliament giving Singapore its new constitution. This was a big and bitter pill to swallow, because it meant that Singapore could no longer have dominion status since under the act of Parliament and not by treaty the United Kingdom retains considerable powers. The Colonial Office was still not satisfied and asked for a practical guarantee that future Singapore Governments would honour these obligations. We took another big step backwards and agreed to give the British Government the right to suspend our constitution. Still not satisfied, the Colonial Office then asked for guarantees that it would have civilian facilities which it might require for the use of the base, such as supply of water, use of roads. So we offered that in the act of Parliament, an obligation, on the part of the Government of Singapore to co-operate with the United Kingdom Government for the supply of all necessary civilian facilities. The Colonial Office then spoke of its obligation to the local people and wanted joint control over internal security. This we refused. We refused to allow the Commissioner of Police to appeal over the head of his minister to the British High Commissioner. We refused the Commissioner of Police a seat on the defence and security council on the same level as his own minister. The Colonial Office finally seemingly abandoned the question of internal security but insisted that the High Commissioner should have powers to make Emergency Regulations and the British Government should have powers to make orders in Council over-riding our local laws after consultation with the defence and security council. But they also insisted on having the majority vote on the defence and security council by having the High Commissioner as the Chairman what that meant is that the British Government could at any time make Emergency Regulations and make orders in Council to affect every aspect of our political life by getting its nominee on the Council to approve it. It is true they said that they would do this only in the name of external defence and foreign affairs: but when we asked them for a definition of external defence and foreign affairs in writing, those two phrases took three full and lengthy paragraphs, and even a man who is not a lawyer, on reading them, would agree that, under the euphemism of external defence and foreign affairs, the British Government was retaining the right to make laws in every sphere of our public life. At the same time the Colonial Office made it clear that the Governor, Sir Robert Black, would remain in Government House but his name would be changed to High Commissioner.

It seems that in their view the time is not ripe for a Malayan to occupy Government House. The Colonial Office also made it clear that Singapore would remain under the jurisdiction of the Colonial Office, although it would have the name changed from "Colony of Singapore" to "State of Singapore". For the rest, they agreed that there would be a fully elected Assembly of fifty; that there would be a Council of Elected Ministers presided over by the Prime Minister. As the new status offered I was anxious to ascertain what would be the position as regards citizenship since some of the delegates insisted that citizenship can only be offered to the domiciled aliens if there was a single Singapore Nationality. On this question the Colonial Office was genuinely co-operative, and, although it indicated there were a number of technicalities involved it agreed we should have facilities for the creation of a single Singapore Nationality which would include British Subjects born in Singapore as well as giving a right to domiciled

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aliens to become nationals. Then we came/ of Malayanisation, the Colonial Office insisted that it was not only interested in compensation for expatriates but also in what it called the "continuing efficacy of the Civil Service". I was pressed by the Secretary of State to indicate the Singapore Government's view on the Malayanisation Report, and, after consultation with my ministers in London, I informed the conference that the ministers at the conference would recommend to the Council of Ministers in Singapore the acceptance in full of the Malayanisation, majority report for the first year, and that we would not bind future Governments in respect of the remaining recommendations of the Malayanisation Report as a different Government might be in power when the new constitution took effect as we hoped in next April.

We then went back to the question of the over-riding powers that the Colonial Office insisted on and we offered to accept these over-riding powers if the Chairman of the Defence and Security Council were appointed by the United Nations since the United Kingdom indicated that it required Singapore as a military base for the discharge of its obligations to the United Nations, to the Commonwealth and to its allies. Our suggestion was rejected.

We reached a point then where the conference was about to break down. I telephoned the Labour Front Central Committee in Singapore and informed them of the position. I received full support for our stand against acceptance of the over-riding Legislative Powers, but they said if the Chairman could be a Malayan appointed by the Government of Federation of Malaya this would be acceptable. I put this to the delegates and the majority were in favour of the proposal. I myself considered that though it gave the Federation Power in Singapore without responsibility, at the same time it meant bringing Singapore much closer to the Federation and so it put us on the right road to the union which we believe to be necessary for the welfare of both territories. This suggestion was also rejected by the Secretary of State, as was a further suggestion of mine that if he could accept a limitation of time on the powers he sought, we might accept them. I suggested that there should be a fixed transition period of two years till April 1959, after which the over-riding powers would end. This he also refused, stating that he had a dislike for dates and that the British Government must retain powers of control in Singapore in addition to the power of suspending the constitution which we offered.

"On the last Saturday, he asked us to reply immediately to a memorandum which he had sent to my office at 8.30 p.m. the previous night," and refused to grant us an adjournment threatening to put an end of the conference then and there. After a personal plea on behalf of the delegation which I made to him in his office, then he finally agreed to an adjournment which he fixed on Tuesday because on Monday he was dealing with Cyprus.

During that weekend there were several meetings between delegates and, finally, on Tuesday when the Colonial Office would still not budge from its position, your delegation voted nine against accepting the British Government's proposal and there were four who abstained (three from the Opposition and one from the Government side).

During my stay in London, I had hundreds of interviews with members of Parliament with members of the Press and with members of more than one Political Party and I can assure you that in all cases, even amongst Conservative Members of Parliament, I found expressions of wonder at our moderation and reasonableness and bewilderment at the stubbornness of the Colonial Office. Immediately after the ending of the conference, I took all the conference papers,

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other than the minutes, and showed them to the leaders of the British Labour Party as well as to certain members of the House of Lords. I learnt that on the following Wednesday morning, the Secretary of State was making a statement on Singapore. I attended the House of Commons and there heard him say that Her Majesty's Government was only asking for powers necessary for the discharge of its responsibilities in the field of external defence and foreign affairs. Unfortunately nobody in the House asked him to explain what he meant by external defence and foreign affairs, and the House of Commons was not informed of the fact that those two phrases of four words covered in fact three full paragraphs of definition which meant the right of interference in every aspect of our public life. I immediately asked for an interview with the leaders of the British Labour Party who were at all times courteous and helpful, and whilst explaining the position to them and trying to enlist their assistance and to bring the weight of British public opinion to bear on the Colonial Office, an idea came to me which I put to them.

After consideration, they advised me that it was one which contained a possibility for reopening negotiations. I returned to my flat and called an urgent meeting of the delegates. I put this new idea to them. It contains three elements:

- (1) Singapore's relation with the United Kingdom to be through another department and not through the Colonial Office.

People of Singapore, any arrangement which leaves you under the control of the Colonial Office is an arrangement which leaves you a subject people. No matter what written assurances you get, the centuries old traditions of the Colonial Office is something distinct and separate from the democratic principles of the English people. The Colonial Office is a thing apart. The very essence of its philosophy is the exploitation of human beings. There is philosophy of fascism in the international sphere, and no amount of written assurances and promises can make the leopard change its spots.

- (2) The second part of my idea required that we should have a Malayan Governor-General in Government House so that the people of Singapore can learn to coalesce their loyalty in a symbol representing the new nation of Singapore.
- (3) The third part of my idea was that any Emergency Regulation Order-in-Council which was made under the over-riding powers that the United Kingdom sought to retain should have the affirmative approval of the House of Commons. If this is accepted, it would make a dead letter of these Emergency Regulations and Orders-in-Council because no official would dare to use these powers unless in truth and in fact they were vitally necessary and if necessity of such a character arose, then the obvious action would be to suspend the constitution. No official would have the courage to have his conduct scrutinised by the representatives of the people of England unless he was quite certain that he was in the right. The representatives of the people of England who are in the House of Commons would not tolerate a great deal of what is happening now in the name of Colonialism if they could only have knowledge of what is taking place.

Finally the arrangement for over-riding powers must be reviewed after two years.

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When I put this idea to the few delegates who attended the meeting at my flat, they showed no interest. They seemed to be affected by the deep lassitude of defeat. I tried again the next morning and I found the delegates interested in personal and Party manoeuvres, and some of them considered that it was not dignified and in fact shameful for me to approach the Colonial Office to reopen negotiations in view of the way they had slammed the door in our faces.

It was already Thursday morning and the House of Commons was rising for the holidays the next day. I had to act quickly to pin down the Colonial Secretary in view of his statement to the House of Commons, and in order to get British public opinion to force the Colonial Office to meet our just request, I therefore told the delegates that I would be making the approach to the Colonial Office on my own responsibility, and their reaction was: If you want to do it on your responsibility you can do so. That is now my letter to the Secretary of State of the 17th May came to be written. It offers a basis for a constitution that is not a healthy constitution, that is not a constitution which would provide for a permanent relationship of stability and friendship with the United Kingdom but it does offer a basis for a constitution within which the people of Singapore can freely and peacefully advance politically during the next three years. You know that before my letter before it could reach the Secretary of State, the PAP Leader called a conference of the English Press, indulged in personal abuse of me, said the idea was mad and I was a "Great Humbug". He succeeded in torpedoing a possibility for immediate reopening of the talks and gave Lennox-Boyd the chance to say in the House of Commons that the Singapore delegation had disintegrated.

I have been censured by many for my action in seeking to keep the door open on my own responsibility. I still believe that what I did was right. It has helped awaken the British public opinion and Parliament and they may yet force the Colonial Office to act reasonably.

You will notice that on the very next morning - on the 18th of May - the Secretary of State found it necessary to inform the House of Commons that he would be prepared to discuss my proposal on a Government to Government basis. But in the reply I received from him to my letter, he referred to only one of the three elements of my proposal, and, although I immediately wrote for clarification, I have had received a very ambiguous reply to this I have written again pleading for a plain answer. There is no answer yet.

The question is a simple one. If the Secretary of State meant what he said to the House of Commons on the 18th of May, then there is a basis for reopening negotiations, not for full merdeka but for something that is temporarily adequate, and if this is the case, I intend to put the question before the Assembly for its approval. What is surprising however, is that it has taken so long for the Secretary of State to indicate whether what he said to the House of Commons was meant by him or whether he meant something totally different.

One final matter before I leave you. I have for many months now, informed you that my whole political philosophy is based on my appreciation of the sense of reasonableness and Justice of the British people. I have promised you that we would get freedom constitutionally and that we would progress politically and economically in harmonious partnership within the Commonwealth. I have also assured you that if I found I was wrong I would resign.

Whatever the disagreements amongst the delegates in the merdeka delegation, as its leader and is your Chief Minister, I have had a full and fair opportunity to prove my theories. I have failed, and I am somewhat surprised at the reaction in Singapore now that my resignation is imminent. I have received some very strong protests both from my own party and outside my party against what they called my desertion of the people of Singapore at a crucial time. People of Singapore, I hope you will understand that when I went to England I made it clear to the Colonial Office that if we did not get an honest constitution I would resign from the Chief Ministership. At first they did not believe me, but ultimately they did, I think that this had a material effect in the concessions they made. It would be wrong for me now to change my mind. Your Chief Minister should not only be honest but he should also be transparently honest for all to see. If I were to change my mind now, I would seem to be but a bluffer who tried to play a game of poker with the Colonial Office and lost. This would not be healthy for you, and whatever the pressures that may be applied to me - and the ~~worst~~ pressures are those from friends - I ask you to understand my position, it is not for any personal reasons but for your own long term welfare that I consider it important that your Chief Minister should always keep his word. I have promised to resign if I failed in the mission. I have failed. That promise I must keep. There are other reasons why I should fade out. But this reason is one that every citizen must agree with.

May my successor lead you to freedom in democracy.

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