

SINGAPORE GOVERNMENT PRESS STATEMENT

MC.DE.37/65 (LAB.)

SPEECH BY THE MINISTER FOR SOCIAL AFFAIRS,  
INCHE OTHMAN WOK, IN THE DEBATE ON THE PRIME  
MINISTER'S MOTION OF THANKS TO THE YANG DI-  
PERTUAN NEGARA FOR HIS ADDRESS ON BEHALF OF  
THE GOVERNMENT IN PARLIAMENT ON THURSDAY,  
DECEMBER 16, 1965.

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Mr. Speaker, Sir,

At the opening of the First Session of the Singapore Parliament, exactly four months after the promulgation of Singapore as an independent and sovereign state, the Head of State, His Excellency the Yang di-Pertuan Negara, remarked that:-

"When we last met in this Chamber, little did we foresee that in two years we would meet here again as a sovereign legislature of an independent nation, a separate member of the Commonwealth and of the United Nations".

In fact even in this very House, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the atmosphere and the scene have changed. The seats in front of us which were 90% empty after the last general election in 1963 are now all completely unoccupied. And since last Monday we have missed the sight of eight tiny men in black trousers and white shirts, shuffling in and out of this Chamber shouting silly and sometimes insolent remarks whenever Government members spoke.

Although we are in no position to predict the length of their absence, there are indications that their boycott will go on at least for the whole of this session. It is hard for us to understand what sort of people they are and what they really want. They talk of democracy but when they are given the opportunities through democratic parliamentary process to air their grievances face to face with us, they prefer to absent themselves to shout morbid and empty slogans outside this Chamber to the effect that the Government is undemocratic and dictatorial.

Since the 9th of August the Barisan Sosialis has lost much of its ground - support, not because of the so-called undemocratic and dictatorial attitudes of the P.A.P. Government, but because of their puerile and stupid actions and utterances which are prejudicial to the interests of the people.

At a time when we were working feverishly for the re-unification of Singapore and Malaya in the establishment of Malaysia a few years ago, they worked in the opposite direction. They branded Malaysia as a neo-colonialist plot. They opposed merger to fight for an independent Singapore. Independence first, followed by merger at a later stage was their formula. And now that Singapore is no longer part of Malaysia but has become an independent and sovereign state, they say: we don't want an independent Singapore because it is phoney independence and is a plot of the British colonialists and imperialists working hand in glove with their stooges.

Mr. Speaker .....2/-

Mr. Speaker, Sir, nobody can gainsay that Singapore's independence is genuine, to substantiate which there is more than ample testimony. We were admitted into the United Nations without any hitch. No African or Asian country opposed our application for membership of the Afro-Asian Organisation which unfortunately failed to hold its meeting in Algiers. In fact in the United Nations as well as the Afro-Asian Organisation we were accepted with open arms. If our independence were phoney, as the Barisan Sosialis claimed, surely we would have been rebuffed by these two bodies.

There is further proof of our State's legitimacy. And again, Mr. Speaker, Sir, our mission led by the Deputy Prime Minister, was well received and highly honoured by African, European and Asian countries. The countries they visited represented every shade of ideology from non-Communist to Communist countries. They not only accepted Singapore as an independent and sovereign state but also saw the presence of the British base in the correct perspective. They were convinced that the protective base here would not negate nor detract from our independence.

Against this background we can clearly understand that at this meeting members of the Barisan Sosialis have absented themselves because their attempts to hoodwink the people on the phoney independence myth have failed miserably. Their unfounded allegations that independence has loaded Singapore with acute and chaotic economic problems fall on deaf ears. The people of Singapore refuse to listen to such silly and childish remarks and will not allow themselves to follow a suicidal course like that of 1961 when the Barisan Sosialis created economic paralysis by launching strikes which resulted in the closure of many factories, unemployment among workers and transfer of capital across the Causeway.

I suggest, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that the Barisan Sosialis gentlemen should have their heads examined: after all they have plenty of free time in which to do this, for instead of fulfilling their Parliamentary obligations as the Opposition here, they are now on holiday.

Four months after our separation from Malaysia, Singapore is still very much alive and is in fact even more viable. As revealed by my colleagues, the Minister for Finance, in his Budget speech, there is every indication that Singapore will definitely survive and prosper in the years ahead. His "painless" Budget has been viewed by the people as an index of confidence in Singapore's economic future. As an encouraging first step some overseas buyers have already made bulk purchases of our locally manufactured plywood, veneer and textiles. And now they are engaged in exploring the possibilities of .....3/-

possibilities of introducing a wider range of locally manufactured products to the markets of their respective countries.

The trend is that more and more overseas trade missions will visit Singapore, not only from the non-Communist countries but also from the European Communist countries. For example, Yugoslavia and Russia have expressed their desire of relations with us. We encourage relations like these on the basis of mutual benefit. It is our hope that economic relations will be the prelude to other and closer relations. This can be our contribution to international goodwill and understanding.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is not without reasons that Singapore is the centre of communications and business in South-East Asia and has within the last 150 years developed into the fifth largest port in the world. This is due to a quirk of geography - that we are in the centre of world trade routes.

But some people in the neighbouring territory refuse to accept this. To them Singapore was and still is nothing more than a small fish which makes a tasty morsel. But two years of Malaysia made them realize that what they mistook for the "ikan bilis" was really the "ikan lpu," which small though it be, is protected by a ring of poisonous spikes. So to save their own skin, they had perforce to spew out the "ikan lpu." For during the two years we were in Malaysia, Sir, we amply demonstrated ourselves as a people not to be cowed into submission but willing and able to fight for principles and inalienable rights.

We had joined Malaysia in the sincere conviction that we could play our part in helping to create a multi-racial, equal and just society. We were willing to co-operate and offer whatever help we could in a common endeavour to improve the lot of the less privileged in the country. We offered the services of our experts to help them to build low-cost housing for the lower income groups and so on. But our offers were flatly rejected; instead the Malaysian Government went around on the quiet to find out how we ran our efficient Government machinery, how we could build low-cost houses, schools, clinics, hospitals and other social amenities. Openly they expressed their envy for our achievements which could have given them inspiration to embark on similar projects but which were only regarded by them as posing a challenge against them.

Three days after the Singapore general elections in 1963 UMNO members in Geylang Serai, led by their extremist leaders from Kuala Lumpur, burnt an effigy of the Prime Minister. This was to give expression to their frustration because their candidates were rejected  
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by the people and all had lost their seats. From then on the vicious propaganda that "the P.A.P. Chinese Government is suppressing the Malays" was echoed with monotonous regularity by the UMNO leaders in their speeches and in the Jawi Press.

It was a systematic campaign. Social projects designed to benefit the Malays were distorted. Low-cost flats aimed at providing the Malays with modern facilities were decried on the fictitious ground that they were not suitable for Malays who prefer to stay only in kampong-type houses. Malay families were threatened into refusing occupancy of these flats, described by the Utusan Melayu as "pigeon holes."

The vicious propaganda went on, day in, day out. Their aim was to impede Singapore's social and economic headway. Under the influence of the extremists, the Malays refused to move out of their dilapidated houses to make way for modern flats. Urban development projects were held up.

As part of the campaign to topple the Singapore Government, the extremists incited the Malays with communal slogans of one race, one language and one religion. This culminated in the two riots of July and September last year. Those two race riots would not have happened but for the determination of the extremists and racialists to force the people of Singapore into accepting Malay rule. In fact the position was neatly summarised by an UMNO backbencher when he said at the Second Session of the Malaysian Parliament that "the trouble with Singapore is that it is not accustomed to Malay rule."

Even after our expulsion, the extremists would not leave us alone and blatantly interfered in our internal affairs by exploiting religious and language issues. Their attempts in the Jawi Press to create religious conflict in Singapore were foiled before any damage could be done. Then they switched over to language. During our Second National Language Month concluded recently, these right-wing extremists claiming to be "the anti-national language leaders" distributed literature denouncing Malay as the National Language and demanding that Chinese be made the sole national language of the State. These pamphlets written in romanised Malay were purported to have originated from Chinese language chauvinists. Their game was exposed and the pamphlets were traced to be the work of the Malay extremists, their real intention being to create communal ill feelings between the Malays and Chinese which might result in racial conflagration.

In conclusion, I would like to echo the Prime Minister's suggestion that a more rational relationship between the Malaysian Government and the Singapore Government be ironed out at the conference table. As for  
the Malays .....5/-

the Malays in Singapore, I would appeal to them to steer clear off the communal blandishments of the Malay extremists. The real interest of the Malays lies in co-operating with the other communities in a concerted effort to achieve economic viability, step up the standard of living and create a more just and equal national multi-racial society in which every citizen irrespective of racial origin can make the most of the opportunities of life.

DECEMBER 16, 1965.

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