

SPEECH BY THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE, DR. GOH KENG SWEE,  
IN MOVING THE SECOND READING OF THE NATIONAL SERVICE  
(AMENDMENT) BILL IN THE SINGAPORE PARLIAMENT ON  
MONDAY, 13TH MARCH, 1967.

I beg to move that the Bill be read a second time.  
I have the President's recommendation to proceed with the reading  
of the Bill.

One of the difficulties confronting me as Minister of  
Defence is the novelty of my responsibility. There are no precedents  
to fall back upon. When one thinks of what elements should be taken  
into account in framing a meaningful defence policy for Singapore,  
one has to begin from first principles.

A useful starting point is to ask oneself why bother about  
defending Singapore at all? I am not being facetious in asking this  
question for there are people, laymen as well as experts, who say that  
we should not. They tell you that the Island is quite indefensible,  
if there is a sustained major attack upon it, it is unlikely that,  
without major assistance from outside, Singapore can hold out.

There are, however, excellent reasons why we should bother  
about defence. I believe that the people who hold the contrary view  
are mistaken. For the logical conclusion drawn from their premise is  
that Singapore must revert to a colony or satellite of whoever wishes  
to afford it protection. If you are in a completely vulnerable position  
anyone disposed to do so can hold you to ransom and life for you will  
become very tiresome.

I consider it to be wrong to believe that there is nothing  
we can or should do about defending ourselves, even though we cannot  
achieve complete invulnerability by our unaided efforts. In a sense,  
the larger countries of the world today, other than the nuclear super  
powers, are indefensible. None of the European States can hope to  
survive a nuclear attack by the Soviet Union either singly or in  
combination. Yet this has not prevented them from spending enormous  
sums of money in defence. The two nuclear super powers have found  
themselves paralysed in a balance of terror and yet both continue to  
devote enormous resources to defence.

One cannot but regret all this - that the keenest scientific  
minds are devoted to discovering and developing more effective methods  
of mass destruction rather than trying to bring about more human  
happiness and progress - but that is the world as we find it today, and  
for small States like ours, we have to accept the position as it is,  
not as we would like it.

Singapore is not the smallest of independent States nor is it the poorest. One of the unexpected developments of the post-war world has been the proliferation of large numbers of small states consequent on the decolonisation process. Especially in the last ten years, large numbers of new states, often with artificial boundaries, small populations and dubious economies, have come into existence. If their present position is uncertain, their future prospects are even more doubtful.

Small states are likely to be a great source of trouble in the world if they cannot look after themselves. If the management of their domestic affairs is so bad as to invite civil war and disorder, there is always the risk that larger states may be tempted to intervene. Where this happens to a small state situated in a strategic area as, for instance, South Vietnam, the great super powers get mixed up and the risk arises of escalation to something more dangerous than a local conflict. Unstable, badly managed and poorly defended small states are thus a threat to the security and peace of the world.

By the same token, if small states can manage their affairs efficiently and can raise sufficient defence forces to deter others from risky adventures by making them costly, then they would add to the stability and security of the whole region. The survival of small states within their original territorial boundaries has today much greater prospects of success than a cursory view would suggest. For the two nuclear super powers apparently are in favour of freezing existing boundaries as one method of reducing the danger of nuclear war between themselves by eliminating any temptation to be involved in quarrels between other nations -- states. Where a small state is strategically situated, as Singapore is, it is important that it should maintain adequate defence forces. It goes without saying that the real security which we want can be found, not by our unaided efforts alone but in an alliance with others. In the long term, Singapore should work towards the establishment of some kind of regional defence arrangement, possibly within a larger international framework. In this kind of regional defence alliance, we are likely to be a more valuable partner and hence can exert more influence, if we can make a defence contribution of some significance, rather than if we are utterly dependent on the arms of other states.

There is another important aspect of our defence effort. This is a contribution it can make to nation building. Nothing creates loyalty and national consciousness more speedily and more thoroughly than participation in defence and membership of the armed forces. This has been the experience of other countries; there is no reason why it will not hold true in Singapore. The nation building aspect of defence will be more significant if its participation is spread out over

all strata of society. This is possible only with some kind of national service. If we were to depend only on a standing army of professionals, then we would get so many numbers of soldiers and no more. The civilians remain spectators outside the orbit of the defence forces except for the small number who take part as part-time soldiers.

One important side to the nation building process is that there are not many members of our monied and intellectual elite who have grasped the elementary point that their status and position can only be justified and maintained if they undertake a responsibility in the defence of the nation consistent with their position. In a society like Britain where class distinctions are traditional, you will find that up to very recently it has been the ruling class, the landed aristocracy, who have supplied the military and naval leaders, with whose exploits every school-boy in our English language schools is doubtless familiar. The British ruling class has never abdicated its right to govern through unwillingness to bear arms on behalf of the nation.

Ours, of course, is a different kind of society with regrettable weaknesses. Our intelligentsia and wealthy citizens would do well to read that part of Plato's "Republic" dealing with the inevitable decline of oligarchies of rich men whose sons are spoilt by easy living and whose flabbiness becomes obvious to the citizens whom they govern, that they eventually decide to take over power from them and deprive them of their wealth and their positions. It is not a coincidence that sons of the British elite, as part of their classical education in the public schools, are taught not only Plato but also "The Peloponnesian War" of Thucydides. Only so do you create a breed that governs an empire.

Because of our historical past, ours is a society which is deficient in many qualities, excelling only in the ability to get on in life whatever the regime. Some of these indispensable qualities — social discipline and moral values — have unfortunately not been instilled in our education system to the extent that one would have wished. The result is a generation of young people who are largely amoral. They are easy victims of all kinds of ideas, passions and fads — be they the subversive doctrines of the Communists underground or the seductions of Beatle music and Beatnik philosophy. Such abominations in human conduct may be accepted with equanimity in large and wealthy societies. When we are trying to survive in a tight situation, there is very little place for harmful or even meaningless activities. At best, these are irrelevant eccentricities; at worst, they lead the young into a world of fantasy and make them unfit for the strenuous exertions that may lie ahead.

It is against the background of such considerations that our National Service scheme has been worked out. A minority of the young men will be selected for a two-year full-time stint in the Army. Those selected for promotion to the officer grade will do three years. At the end of their military service, they will be emplaced in civilian occupations appropriate to their ability and qualifications. Sufficient numbers of such posts in Government service, the Statutory Boards and large private firms will be reserved for discharged National Servicemen. Legislation on this will be presented to Parliament shortly. We intend to select the pick of our youth, within each education grade, for the Army and there is little doubt that prospective employers will be very eager to obtain their services. This is as it should be.

Those not selected for the Army will be allocated to the People's Defence Force, the Vigilante Corps and the Special Constabulary. They do part-time training during their off-work or off-duty hours. This means that those who are engaged in higher studies either in the H.S.C. classes or in the Universities will not have their studies upset. At the same time, it does not mean that by being posted now to the P.D.F., the Vigilante Corps or the Special Constabulary to do part-time work, they will not subsequently be called up for full-time military service on completion of their studies. There is need for quality in the Army, as in any other organisation, and the highly educated must do their stint along with the others.

In all the four Branches of National Service - the full-time Army, the People's Defence Force, the Vigilante Corps and the Special Constabulary - National Servicemen will receive, in addition to technical training specific to their Branch, instruction in moral values. This will teach them what good citizenship means and explain the nature of their social responsibilities. It is my intention, when the training manuals on this subject have been drafted, to seek guidance from the Inter-Religious Council of the Republic, both on the content of moral instruction and the method of implementation. I am sure that there is a substantial common ground among the great religions of the world, whose values, if imparted to our youth, will make them better men.

Now a word about the mechanics of this exercise. The names, addresses, age and other particulars of all men liable to national registration are known to the Government and in fact have been fed into the electronic computer in the Ministry of Finance. On the 17th of this month, pink cards which we call Registration Reminders will be sent by post to young men liable to register. These cards will be sent to the last known address, but some of these cards may go astray. In the rural

areas there is no proper system in the numbering of houses, some of which were illegally constructed; and in the slums anything up to twenty families may share a house and letters often go astray. Therefore, if a young man does not get his pink reminder card in a week's time he should enquire at the nearest community centre. In the present exercise we are registering only those male youths born between 1st January, 1949 and 30th June, 1949. There are approximately 9,000 of them. Those born after 30th June 1949 will be registered later this year. Sixteen days - from 28th March to 18th April - have been set aside for registration and four registration centres will be in operation. The Central Manpower Base in Kalang will be open each day from 9 a.m. to 9 p.m. The Katong, Serangoon and Bukit Panjang District Offices will be open each day from 2 p.m. to 9 p.m.

In the middle of May, medical examinations will take place and the final selection of who is to go into what Branch will be made in July. Enlistment notices informing young men in which Branch of National Service they will serve will be despatched as from 11th July. National Service itself is scheduled to commence on the 26th July this year.

There are many complications in this exercise, as there are bound to be. I do not wish to go into all of them. The Manpower Division of my Ministry has prepared a pamphlet which explains what those who are liable to National Service have to do. Five hundred members of the staff of the People's Association who work in the community centres have been briefed by the Ministry so as to enable them better to give guidance and answer questions about National Service. The booklet on National Service will be available at all community centres in the next few days. These pamphlets will also be distributed to schools. Any Association which wants copies of these pamphlets should apply to the Ministry of the Interior and Defence Manpower Division, stating in what language or languages they wish to have them. At present copies are available in English and Chinese. Copies in Malay and Tamil will be available shortly.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, with the passage of this legislation, the Republic moves into a new era. Often in the past, people have listened to Ministers of the Government urging upon them the paramount need to build a rugged, closely-knit society. Some might have wondered what this meant and might have dismissed it as so much talk. Now they know that it is not merely talk. Behind the exhortation lies a concept, a vision if you like, of the new society that must emerge in this island if we want to retain all the good that we have built in the past.