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PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARY, MINISTRY OF
EDUCATION, AT THE FIFTH NATIONAL DAY
CELEBRATION COMMITTEE OF THE ALJUNIED
CONSTITUENCY AT JOO SENG COMMUNITY CENTRE
ON SUNDAY 16.8.1970 AT 7.30 P.M.

We live in an area of the world where events are moving at a breathless pace and where change (not always for the better) is taking place at a rate too swift for us to grasp its full significance. There is already a vast difference between the South-East Asia we knew five years ago and the South-East Asia of today. What is true of South-East Asia is also true of Asia as a whole.

We have managed to survive and safeguard our way of life on our own during the past five years. We can continue to do so in the years ahead provided we never allow ourselves to be overawed by difficulties and imprisoned by outmoded ways of thinking. We must constantly change and readjust our ideas and our policies to fit in with the changing realities. To keep on chanting slogans which have been invalidated by the march of events is to make more certain our being overwhelmed by events.

This is the lesson that the local pro-Communists have yet to learn. Their ideas and slogans bear no relation to present day realities. They go running about asking the people to rise up and crush British colonialism even as the British are pulling out militarily from Singapore. They declare Singapore's independence as phoney simply because the Government does not echo the slogans or follow the policies which serve the national interests of other countries.

Because their slogans bear no relation to realities in our country the frustrated pro-Communists are reduced to venting their rage in senseless acts of hooliganism and destruction. Small groups of juveniles have been going around destroying National Day decorations. These pro-Communists know that these acts of hooliganism are angering the people but these anti-national elements are no longer interested in winning over the people. They decided many years ago that the people of Singapore cannot be won over. That is why they quit parliament and decided to boycott elections. They hoped to get control over the people by

intimidating them through acts of violence. Even in this they have not succeeded. So they are now reduced to corrupting followers who are largely immature youths by instilling in them the manners and values of street hooligans. The adults who instigate our young people to violence do not themselves participate in these acts of hooliganism. They know how to look after their skins. In fact these revolutionary heroes, in an effort to get public sympathy, not only use young people for their acts of hooliganism but are resorting more and more to the use of young girls. The strapping male pro-Communists read all about the "struggle in the streets" in the comfort of their homes.

However let us not underestimate the local pro-Communists or their power to do harm. Sooner or later they will discover that the present tactics of hooliganism is not getting them anywhere and turn to other methods of struggle. Their primary objective is to create conditions to retard economic and social progress in Singapore. To do this they must create an impression of chaos and unrest in Singapore. They themselves have not put forward any constructive, concrete alternative how to make life better for the people; how to ensure their security in an area bristling with threats of violence.

While keeping the pro-Communists in check we, the people of Singapore, must be prepared to change our ideas to fit changing realities. Sometimes such adjustments may be painful. For example it will be necessary sometimes to make short-term sacrifices for long term gains. Sometimes unfavourable developments outside - such as British decision to run down their base in Singapore - may force us to resort to unpleasant remedies to effect a cure. In the kind of situation we find ourselves in South-East Asia today we must learn to accept the fact that the way ahead is not going to be all smooth. The responsibility of the Government is to try and chart out a smooth and comfortable passage, but it must tell the people and train the people to meet the unavoidably rough patches as well. Once people understand that the way ahead is not all smooth then they will be better equipped to overcome difficulties.

This was the spirit which has guided us during our five years of independence. That is why an independent Singapore has not been reduced to chaos or been impoverished as some people had expected. It is this same spirit of realism and intellectual resilience which must guide us in the years ahead.