

SINGAPORE GOVERNMENT PRESS STATEMENT

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TEXT OF SPEECH BY THE MINISTER FOR HOME AFFAIRS,
PROF. WONG LEE KEE, AT THE THIRD ANNIVERSARY DINNER
OF THE SHOE-MAKERS' CO-OPERATIVE INDUSTRIAL SOCIETY
(S) LTD., AT THE GOLDEN PHOENIX, HOTEL EQUATORIAL,
ON SUNDAY, MARCH 21, 1971, AT 8 P.M.

It gives me great pleasure to be here tonight. My congratulations go to the management of the Shoe-Makers' Co-operative for a successful financial year. Within two years of operation, the Co-operative has become a flourishing business venture.

This Co-operative is part of the effort of the Government to encourage ex-political detainees to become useful members of society. Its success is a tribute to those who have managed its affairs. This shows that their talent for political organization can also be directed into commercial ventures. While the success of the Co-operative directly benefits its members, it is also a contribution, although a small one, towards our industrial effort, and development of our national economy.

Of late, there has been some publicity with regards to political detention in our Republic, as well as misrepresentation of our rehabilitation programme. I like to take this opportunity to clarify the state of affairs.

It is a matter of contemporary political life that any society in transition has a political detention law in one form or another. Indeed, I have not been able to find any such society without such a law, nor any government in such a society, hesitating to exercise the powers given by such a law, should the situation demands it. In the context of a given security situation, if detention is necessary, then it is necessary to detain.

We have left behind our anti-colonial struggle, but we are still a society in transition. Our current stability is the result of several factors - sound policies, international confidence in the future of the Republic, and firm action on the part of government against those whose objective is to disrupt the public peace, or discredit the Government, not for the benefit of Singapore, but for revolutionary ends.

The periodic appearance of subversive banners and posters, the arsonists and the explosion of home-made bombs that so far have made more noise than damage, are grim reminders that those who are behind these activities lack not the will but the capacity to translate their intention into acts of terrorism. We should make every use of the current stability to consolidate our political system, and institutionalize our values.

It is not the intention of the Government to detain anyone longer than is necessary to rehabilitate him as a member of society. The effort is sustained and continuous. It has been as a whole successful. But there is a core of detainees who are as hard as nails. They are moved neither by the prospect of personal freedom nor compassion for the welfare of their own families to recant their ideology or support our political system. Nevertheless, their status is under periodic review, and their rehabilitation receives constant attention.

One of the key objectives of rehabilitation is to provide the detainees with training so that when they are released, they are equipped to earn a living. It will be recalled that many neglected their education in their youth in their revolutionary zeal. If they are to be able to earn a living, they must be trained for the purpose.

Some ex-detainees are non-citizens. They have applied for Singapore citizenship. They will be given the same consideration as others in their application, if by their activities they leave no doubt that they are loyal to our political system and our Republic. This is part of the rehabilitation process.

I begin on a note of the success of the Co-operative. I conclude with the wish that its success will be repeated every year in the future.

MARCH 20, 1971.

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