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SPEECH BY PROF. WONG LIH KEN, MINISTER FOR HOME  
AFFAIRS, AT PAYA LERAN CONSTITUENCY'S NATIONAL  
DAY CELEBRATION DINNER ON MONDAY, 30TH AUGUST  
1971 AT 8.00 P.M. AT PAYA LERAN COMMUNITY CENTRE

In the last twelve years, we have gone through great changes. In 1959, self-government; 1963, merger and Malaysia; August, 1965, an independent Singapore - major events, all within our living memory and affecting our lives in a way beyond prediction at the time of occurrence. This decade will be just as eventful, if not more, as the big powers make their accommodations. As a small country, we have to be watchful, that whatever they decide, our national interests do not suffer.

The greatest safeguard is that as a nation we have sufficient freedom to take any action that secure for ourselves the maximum benefits in any situation. No one country is completely independent: not even the United States, in matters of security and economic growth. To-day, all nations are inter-dependent, including ourselves. But, within this inter-dependence, we should ensure that we have sufficient power on our own to take independent actions in our collective interests.

The essential condition for this sufficiency is order and stability, bolstered by prosperity. Order and stability can be upset in a multi-racial society, if we concentrate on issues that divide us and not on those that unite us. As an independent state, in the last six years, we have done better than in the previous six years since self-government. This is because we have concentrated on issues that unite us rather than on those that divide us. We are likely to continue this rate of progress if we maintain this same pragmatic approach to our problems.

Honest government, providing a livelihood for the people, and defence of country - these are the criteria of good government enunciated by Confucius. They are as valid to-day, as when they were first enunciated over two thousand years ago.

It is relevant to bear in mind also the objectives of good government in Confucian political philosophy. They were order and stability. Order and stability must also be our objectives. Indeed, where independent countries have failed in Afro-Asia, it is because for various reasons they have not succeeded in inculcating values and building political institutions that make for order and stability. Changes of government have often meant changes in system of government and basic political philosophy. It has not been one party taking over the government from another, and basic values and institutions remaining the same, like in America or Britain.

No government policy is without blemish or can be implemented without offending at least some people. But, by and large, we have good government in Singapore. Bad government has been forgotten: there is no standard for comparison for what has been done. So, we have a growing number of critics for whom the government does not seem to have done any good. There is a Chinese proverb that runs: "坐井觀天 (tso ching kuan t'ien)". It means when you look up from the bottom of the well, you mistake what little of the sky you see as the whole sky. So, many of our critics are at the bottom of the well. They see only the harsher features of our policy and make them appear more important than what has been achieved. In any case, sometimes harsh things have to be done. Five years ago, the choice before thousands of workers was work or no work. With wage restraints, the workers now can choose their jobs, within the limits of their skill. Before long, they will have the advantage of better wages, if things turn out right. No government is without blemish, not even good government. But when you hear criticism or read it, you should also ask yourself, is the critic sitting at the bottom of the well.

DATE: 30th August, 1971.