

SPEECH BY THE MINISTER FOR EDUCATION, MR.
CHEW SWEE KEE, MOVING THE EDUCATION BILL IN
THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY MEETING ON MONDAY,
NOVEMBER 18, 1957.

I hope Hon. Members of this House will not feel overwhelmed by the number of amendments that appear in the motion. We must all agree that the Education Bill has been one of the most difficult and controversial bills in this Assembly.

That the Select Committee has been able to present its report is a sure indication that all members of the Committee have co-operated to the fullest of their ability in coming to a happy solution of most of the difficulties presented by the Bill. In this respect I must thank you as Chairman of the Select Committee in helping all of us to come to the present conclusion.

There were some points which were not entirely agreeable to all members, and I have given an undertaking to consider them and make my recommendations at this sitting. In going through those points I have come to the conclusion that the amendments contained in my motion are necessary not only in improving the language of the bill but also putting things right and generally making the bill workable.

I would not take more time than is necessary in moving my motion by going into detail the various amendments that are now before the House. I will deal with these amendments as each of them comes up and I will explain the need for them.

That Government is able to come to the decisions for the amendments today is due to the fact that there have been useful suggestions and criticisms from members of the public and organisations which have either submitted memoranda to the Select Committee or appeared personally before the Committee's meetings. After all, education is a thing that should concern everybody in this country, both young and old, and it is only right that people should have taken an interest in the Bill.

In introducing this bill, Government is laying the foundation stone for the education of the children of all communities in Singapore without discrimination whatsoever. The job facing Government in educating the children of Singapore is enormous, and unless there is goodwill all around, all our efforts that have been put into this Bill will be in vain.

There have been criticisms levelled at certain discretionary powers to be given to the Director of Education. I want to stress that we have tried to meet those criticisms as best we could, but I must remind the House that unless officials who are to administer the law for the good of the country have certain powers, we might as well have no laws. We must accept in good faith that responsible officers will exercise their powers judiciously and as far as my Ministry is concerned, I can assure the House that I will see that powers are not abused by my officers.

I would like to reiterate the assurance I gave to this House at one of the previous meetings of this Assembly that wherever the Director of Education has discretionary powers under the Education Bill I will take the necessary administrative action in my Ministry to see that he does not exercise those powers to the disadvantage of anyone without prior reference to my Permanent Secretary or to myself.

NOVEMBER 18, 1957.

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