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SPEECH BY MR. FRANCIS THOMAS, MINISTER FOR  
COMMUNICATIONS AND WORKS, AT THE INAUGURAL MEETING OF  
THE SINGAPORE SAFETY FIRST COUNCIL ON JUNE 30, 1958

I should like to start by making clear to you that whilst this Council with its new constitution and new membership will have the fullest support of my Ministry, it is not my intention to try to direct in detail what you do. On the contrary, it is highly desirable that in the important work of Safety First Council should act according to its own judgement, determine its own priorities and work out its own programmes.

With this in mind I propose to withdraw from this meeting as soon as Item 3 on the agenda has been completed. In my opening remarks I only wish to emphasise to you the frame of mind in which I have approached the work which you have public-spiritedly agreed to undertake.

In Singapore it seems to me that we have in the past somewhat neglected two important aspects of Safety First. One of these is safety at work especially in industrial work. As you know the Government has now taken through the 2nd Reading the Factories Bill which has been sent to Select Committee and which the Clerk of the Assembly has invited public representations on. This does not mean however that this Council need not concern itself with safety at work. There is a great deal to be done in this field and indeed a great deal which cannot be done by the writing of laws. In the end accidents occur because of errors by individuals and it is only by getting individuals to be careful that we can make their work safe. Proper provisions under the law are important and indeed essential but they cannot by themselves guarantee safety.

The other aspect which I think has been too much neglected might be described as safety in the home. If you read your newspapers with attention you will see a very large number of stories - often reported quite briefly - describing how a child has been drowned by falling into a washtub or down a well, or has been killed through pulling scalding water on itself, or how a woman has set fire to her dress. Accidents of this sort can be much reduced by getting people to appreciate the need for proper care in their own home lives. It is not very costly or difficult usually to reduce very greatly the risk of domestic accidents. They occur primarily because people are thoughtless or because they are handling things with which they are not traditionally familiar. I believe that in this field your Council could do very valuable work.

I turn now to what to many people is the main aspect of Safety First and that is - Safety on the Roads. Section 2(c) of the Council's constitution accepts the need to analyse accident statistics and I am not going to overwhelm you now with the road accident figures. I would merely like to stress the need for looking at road safety broadly. The actual details of any particular accident are of course important and need to be examined but of equal significance are the factors which contribute to the general pattern of accidents. Perhaps I could illustrate what I mean by expanding at a little length one factor and that is the problem of car parking in the crowded parts of Singapore.

The annual increase in the number of motor vehicles on our roads is at present about 7,700 and the number of licensed drivers of all kinds is increasing by about 19,000 a year. This adds up to a continuing pressure on road space in the centre areas of the City and indeed in other areas also. Consequently the adequacy of car parking facilities has a direct bearing on the safe and

convenient flow of traffic. My own view is that the primary duty of the public sector is to ensure that the roads are as well made and engineered as possible; that public transport is of a satisfactory standard and provides convenient services; and that the police controls are appropriate to the traffic on the roads. I do not regard it as a primary duty of the public sector to provide free car parking for every car which seeks it. Where parking<sup>space</sup> is available it should be used but that is quite a different thing from creating additional parking space at heavy cost to the public purse.

In my view there is a strong case for the introduction of a charge for parking in appropriate parts of the city either by having an enclosed car park for entry to which a suitable charge is made; or by putting parking meters along appropriate streets. The effect primarily sought by the introduction of a charge for parking is to make people consider the necessity of bringing their car into the centre of the city. A small parking charge should not be onerous to those whose business makes it essential for them to come to the crowded areas but would I hope tend to discourage those who take up necessary parking space for trivial reasons.

The question of a multi-storey car park is one which has been given long and thorough study both by the motorist organisations and by public servants. It does not appear that a multi-storey car park would be an economically sound proposition in the present circumstances. It could only be operated if it was subsidised from public funds by grant of land at uneconomic rates or by remission of rates or assessment.

I do not think the need for a multi-storey car park in Singapore is at present great enough to justify a subsidy and I have my doubts whether a subsidy would ever be justified. If such a structure becomes necessary it should be paid for by the motoring population rather than by the general population and it might be that revenue from other car parks or from parking meters could be used to balance the accounts of a multi-storey park.

I have mentioned my personal views on these parking problems at some length because I have no doubt that in considering the safe movement of traffic in the central areas this Council and its Management Committee will find it necessary to give some consideration to the problems of parked cars as they affect moving cars. It is a general factor affecting particular accidents. Any ideas which the Safety First Council can contribute to this problem will be valued and I shall welcome them.

Probably I should add that I fully recognise the important part which the use of motor cars plays in the general development of Singapore. It is essential to Singapore's progress that people should be able to get about by motor transport quickly and conveniently. It is just because of that essential need that the problem of parking deserves special consideration and appropriate measures to ensure that the unnecessary car does not obstruct the necessary one.

I have gone into this particular parking aspect from the point of view of its relationship to road safety not because I want to over-emphasise its importance but because I want to illustrate what I mean when I say that Safety First on the roads needs to be studied broadly and taking into account quite complicated general factors. It would be ideal if we had \$1,000 million to spend on replanning and reconstructing our city so as to make our roads as near accident-proof as possible. Unfortunately our

funds are limited although we are spending a great deal on road improvements and the particular need is to consider means of preservation of life and saving in realistic terms in the context of Singapore today.

You will have noted that our draft constitution proposes a large Council and a small Management Committee. The Council need not meet more than twice a year and those of you who are not on the Management Committee may possibly feel that membership of the Council does not mean very much. I should like to correct any such impression. The object of this large and widely representative Council is to provide broad and varied points of view and proposals which will be needed by the Management Committee. The constitution envisages that the detailed work of the Council will be carried out mainly by the Management Committee which is therefore of a size appropriate for detailed work but it will require to work within the pattern of information and views given by the members of the full Council. It will also need the cooperation of the full Council or of particular members in carrying out its work in one aspect or another.

However I do not think I need elaborate on the relationships of the constitution any more. It has been drawn up on the basis of the experience of the old Safety First Council and I think in general provides a practical and workable pattern for the jobs which the Council has in mind. Before I formally put to you Item No. 2 on the Agenda I should like once again to thank you for accepting membership of the Council and to assure you that as far as we can the Ministry of Communications and Works will be at your service.

June 30, 1958.

(Time issued 1615 hours)

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