

SPEECH BY THE MINISTER FOR COMMUNICATIONS AND  
WORKS, MR. FRANCIS THOMAS, TO ST. ANDREW'S SCHOOL  
CULTURAL SOCIAL CLUB ON TUESDAY, JULY 15, 1958.

I am honoured that you should invite me to address you and I am interested that you should have asked me to speak on the role of the English-speaking in the new self-governing Singapore.

I will start by telling you an old Chinese story. Chinese Philosopher Lieh-Tzu lost the axe which he used for chopping firewood. Thinking it over, he decided that it must have been stolen by the young son of his neighbours next door. He therefore took every opportunity of spying through the fence to watch the boy to try to catch him with the axe. The more he watched the boy the more he noticed what a criminal crooked face he had and how sinister and thievish his behaviour was. He became fully convinced that the boy was the thief who had stolen his axe.

Then one day he found the axe which in fact he had himself put behind a piece of wood and forgotten. He now realised that the boy next door was not a thief and did not look like a thief. He was just an ordinary boy looking and behaving like an ordinary boy.

A few days ago a trade union sent me a copy of its newsletter and I found in that a little article describing how dangerous and disastrous suspicion was in a trade union. Through suspicion the union lost its strength and could not succeed in its objectives.

I tell you this story because Singapore today is full of "boys-next-door." There is unfortunately a lot of distrust and fear and suspicion. If you look into your own minds many of you will find that you have fears and suspicions about people. If you could look into other people's minds you might well find that they have fear and suspicions about you.

You asked me to speak about the role of the English-speaking and I suppose somewhere else somebody may be talking about the role of the Chinese-speaking, or of the Malay-speaking, or of the Tamil-speaking.

I should like to remind you that the policy of the Labour Front Government, which has become the policy of all parties in Singapore, is that all languages are equally recognised as paths to learning and national loyalty. The educational aim is that all children should know two languages and if possible three.

I would say to you with the fullest conviction that you have no special role as English-speaking citizens. You are just equal citizens in a wide free community and you must not be marked off from others because you have been educated in a particular language. All citizens have the same duties and the same rights.

Having said that I will agree with you that temporarily there are some special problems for students who have been educated in English and these are worth discussing because it is important that you and others should solve them happily.

Let me tell you some of the things that are said about you. You are snobs, you are corrupted by yellow culture, you are running dogs of the colonialists, you do not care for the masses, you are weak, you have no courage, no energy, no leadership and no revolutionary drive.

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Those are things that some people say about the English-speaking. Do they make you angry? It is only because you are the "boys-next-door," subject to suspicion.

The fact is that in the past the English schools have had the best buildings and the best paid teachers and the students have had more comfortable homes and better prospects of well-paid jobs on leaving school. The result has been that some people have looked on the students of the English schools as being a privileged class. People who are not privileged dislike those who are -- that is the price of privilege, and a very bad price it is.

I have been told -- though I hope it is not true -- that some of the English-speaking students have begun to say bad things about those who are educated in Chinese schools and even about those who are educated in Malay. Probably not much is said about those who are educated in Tamil because they are few. It may be that some of you see the students of the Chinese High School or of Chung Cheng or of Nanyang University as the "boy-next-door." If any of you do feel like that I advise you to stop at once. Suspicion is a terrible enemy for Singapore.

The Government policy since 1955 has been to make all good citizens equal in opportunities and to break down barriers which have been built between different sections in the community. We have opened the doors of Government employment to all who have attained a sufficient educational qualification. Merit, not privilege, is and must be the guide.

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