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SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER AT THE OPENING OF

THE CIVIL SERVICE STUDY CENTRE ON SATURDAY,

15TH AUGUST, 1959.

For several years, two of your Ministers and I have been discussing the problems which a democratic socialist party, committed to a dynamic social programme, will have to face when it assumes power in Singapore. And one of these problems is the civil service through which we have to translate our policies. These two Ministers were then your colleagues. They know the civil service as well as any one of you, for no one can accuse Dr. Goh Keng Swee or Mr. K.M. Byrne of not knowing the civil service in which they have spent the greater part of their lives. I, myself, am not altogether ignorant of the persons who make up the higher echelon of the civil service. Many of you were my contemporaries in school, in Raffles College and, later, in England. It is because we understood the good qualities and the weaknesses of our civil service that we have anticipated fairly accurately the problems that would face us when we assumed office. We debated then the possibility of making the civil service politically alert and alive to the great changes that were taking place and the even

more tremendous changes that will take place in the pattern of governments in Asia.

But although Dr. Goh, Mr. Byrne and I share a great deal in common with you in our educational background, the schools we went to, the colleges we attended, the courses that we took, the examinations that we passed, yet a great deal has happened since we left college. Since then we went through different social experiences, looked upon the same world through different looking glasses and saw different things. And in the end we began to think in different concepts and talk a different language, the concepts of political revolution and the language of the masses.

There were two causes which made people like Dr. Goh and Mr. Byrne change from quiet senior civil servants to articulate mass leaders. One is their innate character. The other is the social-political experience of the last 18 years since the Japanese invasion.

And this Civil Service Study Centre is, in part, an attempt to telescope into a study course the main elements of the political and social forces which caused the post-war revolutions in Asia. If nothing else you will at least understand what was the genesis of the forces that have shaken the British Raj under which

nearly all of you were recruited, and under which you were guaranteed a life time of service with a pension at the end.

Some of you may be bewildered and perplexed by what you may consider the impatience with which we are asking for things to be done. If so, then I hope that at the end of your course in this Study Centre, if you do not share our impatience, you will at least understand it. You will at least appreciate why we consider it so vital, if the democratic state is to survive, for the democratic machinery to be in tune with the temper of the people and tempo of political change in the rest of Asia.

Whether an administration functions efficiently and smoothly in the interests of the people as a whole or in the interests of a small section of the people, depends upon the policies of the Ministers. But it is your responsibility to make sure that there is an efficient civil service.

If you look around you in South-East Asia you may be disturbed by the Phenomena of newly independent countries passing from the first phase of democratic constitutions into military or semi-military dictatorships. Pakistan, Indonesia and Burma are grim reminders to us that the democratic state is not something which will look after itself just by the setting up of a democratic

constitution. There are many reasons why in South-East Asian countries like Pakistan, Indonesia and Burma the democratic system has broken down, and why in India and Ceylon it has, relatively speaking, succeeded. One of the reasons is that both in India and in Ceylon they had the administrators to run the machine of the democratic system. India had more civil servants than Pakistan. In Ceylon they had a long time to build up their civil service. And so, despite all the stresses and strains of racial religions and linguistic classes between Tamils and Singhalese, Buddhists and Hindus, the administration did not collapse.

We cannot pretend to be as fortunately placed in respect of the civil service as the Indian Government was when it became independent. But we are certainly in a much better position than the Indonesians who were practically without any civil service when they took over from the Dutch. For the Dutch did not believe that the Indonesians should be taught how to govern themselves.

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My theme to you today is simply this: You and I have a vested interest in the survival of the democratic state. We the elected Ministers have to work through you and with you to translate our plans and policies into reality. You should give of your best in the service of our people. Whatever your views on socialism, capitalism, liberalism, communism, whether they be progressive or conservative, your task and mine for the next five years are exactly the same, that

is to demonstrate that the democratic system can produce results. It is in our interest to show that under the system of "one man one vote," there can be an honest and efficient government which works through an efficient administration in the interests of the people. If we do not do our best, then we have only ourselves to blame when the people lose faith, not just in you, the public service, and in us, the democratic political leadership, but also in the democratic system of which you and I are working parts. And when they lose faith, then they will look for alternative forms of government. And let us never forget that the Communists are only too ready to offer the people more drastic alternatives in social revolution than the democratic system of government. It is our duty to see that the people are never confronted with such an alternative of despair.

I am confident that if only we can convey to you the tremendous challenge to the existing system that is posed by the expansion of the Communist bloc and the Communist revolution in China, and in particular the M.C.P. in Malaya, you will respond to the urgency of the task. The mass of the people are not concerned with legal and constitutional forms and niceties. They are not interested in the theory of the separation of powers and the purpose and function of a politically neutral public service under such a constitution. As far as they are concerned, in May 1959 they had a form of government under which if they exercised their vote, they would be able to elect their own government. And so

they did elect their own government in order that there might be a better world for them and their children. If the future is not better, either because of the stupidities of elected Ministers, or the inadequacies of the civil servants, then at the end of the five-year term the people are hardly likely to believe, either in the political party that they have elected, or the political system that they have inherited.

The social revolution did not begin nor does it end with Malayisation of the public service. For civil servants this was the most significant aspect of the social revolution that took place in Malaya: the expulsion of the expatriate European from positions of executive control in the civil service and your subsequent elevation to such positions. Some of you, like Dr. Goh and Mr. Byrne, played your part in the fight to remove an unjust system, but all benefited from the work and sacrifice of those who did, and the fight for fairness and equality to the English-educated elite in the civil service is over. But, as far as the mass of the people are concerned, their fight for fairness and equality is just beginning. Having got rid of Colonial domination, and elected their own leaders to direct their own civil service, they want to see the beginning of their social revolution - more and better jobs, better houses for their families, schools for their children and the prospect of an even better future in a more just and equal society.

If the Civil Service Study Centre achieves nothing else but the awakening of your minds to problems which you may have overlooked before, if it opens your minds to political riders which you had formerly regarded from purely administrative eyes as tiresome problems, then it would have succeeded.

We know that the majority of civil servants are loyal and honest to the service - that you are prepared to do your share of work for what the state has promised you in return. But more than that, I am confident that if you could only see through the placid surface of constitutional change in Singapore to the revolutionary forces that are contending for supremacy beneath the constitutional facade, competing for the power to transform society after their own political philosophies and ideologies, then you will become as anxious as we are to bring about a more equal and just society within the framework of the democratic system and as quickly as possible. For there is no other way to preserve what we consider good in the past other than by excising all that was bad in it. To do that in a situation where the mass of the people demand rapid and immediate results means tremendous burdens have to be carried, both by the political leadership and the administrative machinery. The purpose of this Study Centre is not only to stimulate your minds but also to inform you of the acute problems which confront any popularly elected government in a revolutionary situation.

Most of these are problems that face the whole region. Once the problems have been posed to you, you will be the better able to help us work out the solutions to them, by making the administration more sensitive and responsive to the needs and moods of the people.

In formally declaring this Centre open, I ask you - having defined and analysed the problems that confront us - to join us in this task to work more effectively together in establishing a secure and healthy base for democratic institutions through which we hope to establish a liberal, just and happy society.

AUGUST 15, 1959.

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