

SINGAPORE GOVERNMENT PRESS STATEMENT JK/INFS.DE.101/59

MESSAGE FROM THE PRIME MINISTER TO THE SINGAPORE
TRACTION COMPANY EMPLOYEES' UNION AT ITS GENERAL
MEETING ON DECEMBER 15, 1959, AT 7 P.M.

I am happy to be able to renew my long association with your Union over the last five years. In that period, the Singapore Traction Company Employees' Union played a pioneer role in the working class movement. In 1955, in that period of militant trade union activity, you, the workers of the Singapore Traction Company, suffered great privations in one of those long drawn out strikes which was only finally resolved by a Court of Inquiry making recommendations which both the employer and employees had agreed would be binding. Your strike in 1955 heralded a period of industrial struggle between union and employer - some of which were resolved, many of which were left unresolved; some of which went to Commissions of Inquiry, many of which just petered out. Two months ago, under our new policy of industrial peace with justice, your industrial dispute with the employer did not have to go through the tortuous and painful processes of industrial struggle with all its consequent sufferings and hardships. Arbitration by an independent tribunal, whose findings both the employer and your Union have agreed to accept beforehand, resolved your just claims without hardship and

loss to your workers, or damage to the employers, or inconvenience to the public, which any strike action would have necessitated. Here, again, you have blazed the trail for other unions to follow. But that is not to say that every union like yours will be able to succeed in all of its claims in a court of arbitration. Success or failure of a union's claims must depend on the merits of its case.

In another important respect the Singapore Traction Company Employees' Union has also played a pioneer role. As far back as 1956, at the time of the first Court of Inquiry, you will remember that your Union took a strong stand against 'squeeze' and helped considerably to stamp out this evil practice which was in part brought about by the low wages the employer then paid, and mainly because of organised racketeers. It was because the Union succeeded in stamping out corruption that the Singapore Traction Company was able to pay the higher rates of pay awarded by the Court of Inquiry without any increase in bus fares or loss in profits.

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This time, the award of the Court makes it even more important that the Union should stamp out any signs of 'squeeze'. The arbitration award has provided for a sliding scale of bonus - the higher the profits of the company the higher the bonus. This means that if 'squeeze' take place, and it can only take place amongst the conductors, it means that one section of the workers is

cheating another section of their just share of the profits which all of them contribute in its operation. I am told by the Union Committee that there are some signs of petty 'squeeze' restarting here and there. They have assured me that they will take every step to fight corruption and 'squeeze' whether it be from the employer or from the employees. On this, you and your Union will have the whole hearted support of the Government and all its resources in fighting racketeering and corruption. You may be sure that you will have the people of Singapore solidly behind you in your fight for the just rights of your workers, if you ensure that 'squeeze' is eradicated.

Finally, let me take this opportunity to exhort you to guard well that most valuable of qualities of your Union - the unity and solidarity amongst your Chinese, Indian and Malay members, who are almost equal in number, together with a good percentage of Ceylonese and Eurasians. It is always more difficult to run a solid union where the members speak different languages. Your Union, therefore, is an object lesson for all of us in Malaya - that we must find common grounds and emphasise our points of unity, not our points of division. A new phase has opened in the history of Singapore and with it comes a new phase in the trade union movement in which trade union leaders of stature must respond to the needs not only of their own union members but of the community and people as a whole. I wish you and your Union every success in the coming year.

DECEMBER 15, 1959.

(Time issued 1745 hours)

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