

**SINGAPORE GOVERNMENT PRESS STATEMENT**

MC. MA. 72/62/TTS

**TEXT OF SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER, MR. LEE KUAN  
YEW, ON THE SECOND READING OF THE REFERENDUM BILL AT  
THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY SITTING  
ON FRIDAY, MARCH 16, 1962.**

In the last two days in this Assembly there has been a great deal of hypocritical exhortation about democracy and the democratic process made by Barisan Sosialis who are the least qualified to talk about democracy. They have invoked democracy to establish the right of Communists to cause confusion, spread falsehood and try to prevent merger, they the people who are furthest removed from the ideals of Government by the free will of the people. Perhaps the Member for Thomson has forgotten that during the P.A.P. Conference in May last year after the Hong Lim by-election, he was the strongest advocate for talking the Cuban line, and like Fidel Castro, he strongly advocated the abolition of all future elections as being unnecessary and stupid. The Member for Upper Serangoon was then trying to dissuade my colleagues and I from ever contemplating resignation and returning the mandate to the people. At that time

with no merger and common market possible we saw no political solution to our basic problems of economic expansion. He went so far as to say that what was important was not whether the people knew that what we were doing was good for them but whether in fact we were doing good for them, and he capped this argument by saying that had Mao Tse-tung stood for elections after the hardships of the Chinese communes in the last few years he would probably have lost his deposit.

This Referendum Bill has been brought in to determine the wish of the majority of the people on the mode and manner of the inevitable re-unification of the two territories. To put it in proper perspective let me remind Barisan Sosialis, and the Member for Anson, that we are under no obligation, morally or legally, to hold a Referendum. We have a mandate from the people in June 1959 in clear and categorical terms to implement merger between Singapore and the Federation of Malaya. In fact all the 13 Barisan Sosialis Assemblymen were elected on the PAP platform, the main plank of which was merger and had signed solemn pledges that they would resign if they departed from the party programme and expelled from the party.

Next, we have a mandate from this Assembly of 33 unanimous votes with no Assemblymen being bold enough to be present to vote against the proposals for merger contained in Command Paper 33 of 1961. Mr. Lim Chin Siong, the Communist front leader, who is manipulating and co-ordinating Communist policies in Barisan Sosialis and the Communist front unions, has openly told a meeting of committee members of several union officials who taxed him on this point that the Government has full legal and constitutional rights once the proposals have been passed in the Assembly to carry out the merger. Therefore, let us be clear in our minds that the Government is under no compulsion to have this Referendum and there is no necessity to resort to trickery, as the Member for Queenstown has suggested.

Later I will explain the considerations which have led the Government firmly to the view that a Referendum on merger is both desirable and in the long term interests of peaceful and stable conditions in Singapore.

Let me make public the position of the PAP and the Opposition Parties on the question of merger and this Referendum. The SPA and UNMO-Alliance have said openly here that they want this merger to go without any hitch, and what they have stated openly is honest, consistent with what they have said privately that Referendum is an unnecessary risk.

Two of their members, the Member for Farrer Park and the Member for Tanglin have stated publicly that they consider the Government should go through with merger without a bother of a Referendum.

The Member for Hong Lim and his United People's Party, the inaugural meeting of which has yet to be held and a proper committee has yet to be elected privately wants merger established and the Communists curbed by a strong Central Government. He sees clearly where his interests lie. He has openly rejected any call for General Elections made by Barisan Sosialis. The last thing he wants is a General Election before the Communists have been dealt with. It is open knowledge, and he has admitted it to quite a number of members on this side of the House, that he has lost either through persuasion that Barisan Sosialis were on the point of forming the next Government or through intimidation, most of his 'kakis' or runners to the Communists in the unions and the Barisan Sosialis. He has not got the wherewithal to contest and win a general election under present circumstances. He wants to ensure merger when the Communists will be removed from the scene. And he continually encourages Members on this side to expose and attack the Communists. At the same time he hopes to ensure that the PAP would be weakened by smears and false charges of the Communists which he is helping to propagate that we are going to sell out the

rights of the people in order that when the Communists are contained he can emerge as the largest single Party. Therefore, he opposes general elections now. But he is also hoping that the Government will take the odium for this Communist smear of "selling out" a Chinese Singapore to a Malay Federation. He would be quite happy to see the Government carry through merger without a Referendum. Of course, since the Government has decided on a Referendum he attempted to claim that the Referendum has been forced upon the Government because he demanded it.

Now the Member for Anson, the Chairman of the Workers' Party. He made the astonishing remark yesterday which admitted that although his Party has been captured he was not. Privately he said that the Government should go through with this merger without taking a Referendum, but loudly he demands guarantees for a Referendum. What game is he playing? A transparent one, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Unlike the more subtle Member for Hong Lim he blatantly seeks to identify himself with Communist popular causes. Can it be that he is hoping what when their political front organisations become defunct he would inherit the support of their remnant branch organisation? He has admitted to the Minister for Law in a moment of frankness, they after having threatened to box each other in this Chamber recently, that he knew his fate is at the mercy of the Communists and they could pull the carpet on which he stands and he would be finished. He

has no organisation of his own nor is he in a position to make any appeal to the people on his own without the Communist support, whose support, includes the translation of what he says before it can be understood by the Chinese, Malay and Indian masses. He makes a hue and cry of democracy and talked rashly of “blind chickens” and the “canvassing of the dead.” He also wants merger. He knows full well that without merger the country would be ruined and he will have no place in this society. I used to believe that perhaps he has the courage of his convictions. But after the debacle at the Kuala Lumpur Communist front conference of Malaysia and I somewhat hesitant in this belief. In the Malaysia debate in this House, he parted with the Communists. Here in this Chamber he supported it. He went to Kuala Lumpur and in a steering committee, concealed from the public gaze, he told them he was for Malaysia and would have nothing to do with merging with Indonesia as a heart-land of Malaysia. He said that for professional reasons he left for Brunei before the resolution opposing Malaysia was passed by the conference. So he was saved the final humiliation of being present when his party disowned him and voted with the other Communist front delegates opposing Malaysia.

Barisan Sosialis, on the other hand, do not want a Referendum. What they wanted was to capture the Government by either seducing or intimidating 26 Assemblymen to supporting them. That having failed, they now want general elections. The Member for Queenstown repeated this futile cry when he made his speech on the Referendum Bill. He said at the Radio forum last year that the people of Singapore were politically immature for such advanced democratic processes like a Referendum, and that general elections were far better. Since he lost the argument and since his plea for general elections has not found any support from either the Member for Hong Lim or the Member for Anson, or members of the SPA-UMNO-MCA-MIC-ALLIANCE, he would have to try his luck to create mischief in the Referendum Bill. He has asked whether the Government would resign if it loses the Referendum.

Sir, I have to disabuse his mind of any silly notion that there is such a thing as a government winning or losing a Referendum. A Referendum is a process by which we ascertain the wishes of the majority of the people, however imperfect the method. The people's representatives in this Assembly have already endorsed the heads of agreement for a merger between Singapore and the Federation of Malaya.

I am reasonably confident that this accords with the wishes of the majority of the people as being the best terms and conditions to suit our circumstances. But if it so happens that a majority of the people went a different mode and manner of achieving the inevitable reunification of the two territories, for example, not wishing to have local autonomy in education and labour, then it is the duty of the Government to fulfil their wishes. So the question of winning or losing a Referendum does not arise.

If there was a slightest risk of merger being frustrated and the country plunged into disaster by the activities of the Communists manipulating a Referendum, let me say that it will be criminal folly on the part of the Government to hold the Referendum and to allow the future of Malaya and Malaysia to be imperilled. If that were the position, if the risk existed, then regardless of what benefit the Member for Hong Lim or the Member for Anson can reap, by the Government having to carry the odium of living down Communist smears of trying to sell out a Chinese Singapore to a Malay Federation, it is the duty of Government to go through with it to ensure that the peace, security and happiness of the people not just for Singapore but for Malaya and Malaysia are not jeopardised.

But we are in the happier position of not embarking on any such risk, and there would no risk of the Communists by their being too clever by being now able to frustrate merger and Malaysia through smears now in a Referendum.

It is because we are confident of this that we can consider whether the overall position will be better if we carry through merger with a Referendum than without a Referendum. The conclusion we have come to is that in the long term it would be foolish to help the Communists in their smear campaign that merger between Singapore and the Federation is a “sell-out” of Singapore where the Chinese are in the majority to a Malaya where the Malays are in the majority. It is needless for me to refute on the absurdity of this proposition other than to point out that the Communists themselves have stressed that the Federation Government does not want merger with Singapore without Malaysia at the same time. Is it not strange that if Singapore were being sold or given away the Federation is not anxious to take a gift and wants merger with Singapore and the Borneo territories.

There may be certain groups of people who may be influenced by these reckless communal smears and lies. To implement the heads of agreement for a merger without giving the choice in the mode and manner would be to assist the Communists in spreading this evil line by lending credence to these rumours.

The final position which we want to achieve is not just merger, but a merger under which the various races in Malaya will live in peace and harmony. If the Chinese in Singapore and through news reporting of the Chinese Press by pan-Malaysia newspapers like Nanyang Siang Pau and Sin Chew Jit Poh which circulate throughout Malaya and Malaysia from Perlis in the north to Borneo in the east, through lies and falsehood are all infected into believing that in merger and Malaysia the Chinese are being sold out to a Malay dominated Federation, then an unpleasant situation would arise in the Federation and Singapore, and let us not forget that there are after all about three-million Chinese in the Federation.

However politically immature the people may be, a point made by the Member for Queenstown, they will have to face with the realities of life in Singapore, in Malaysia and indeed in South-East Asia. They will have to make the choice of either having merger peacefully by consent, or not so peacefully with unpleasantness forced by the relentless logic of both military, economic, geographical and historical forces.

It is the duty of the Government to try and bring merger and Malaysia about peacefully by consent with the maximum of goodwill and of give and take. For the small percentage who are unable to understand the issues, because it is beyond them or because the Communists have deliberately distorted and twisted

the issues, they can abide by the decision made in this Assembly. This percentage was less than one per cent of the votes cast in the last general elections.

The Member for Anson said that this Assembly means the Government. Sir, if that were completely so, why does he and the Member for Queenstown propose amendments in the Referendum Bill which seeks to let the questions to be posed to be decided in this Assembly and not by the Government. Obviously, there is a qualitative difference. We are unable to accept his proposal that this Assembly of 51 members who are most unlikely to reach any unanimity or any agreement since they have opposing objectives to put the questions. There is no precedent for it anywhere in the world -- Australia, Switzerland or anywhere else. And it would be silly to allow the Communists through Barisan Sosialis to try and wreck the Referendum by causing confusion in the framing of the question. But it is only logical and rational that those who are unable to make up their minds shall be deemed to abide by the decision of the people's representatives in this Assembly.

The amendment to Clause 31, moved by the Opposition, is to make it lawful for people to deface or destroy ballot papers. Under our present election laws, this is a criminal offence. We can clearly see, therefore, that one of the aims is that if the people are going to vote in a way contrary to Communist

interests, they are going to get people to deface, destroy or put in blank ballot papers. This they may be able to bring about by spreading lies that people may lose their citizenship if they vote for or against a proposition. The Government amendment to treat all un-marked or uncertain ballot papers by leaving it to the Assembly will make it unattractive for Communists to want to trick people into throwing their votes away. But it does not interfere with the free choice of the people to vote whichever way they like. Not unnaturally the conclusion we can draw is that one of the tactics of the Communists to counter the Referendum is to cause confusion by tricking or intimidating people to spoil, or deface the ballot paper. This may reach sufficient proportions so that the objectives of the Referendum may be in the public mind frustrated. So the provisions we have made that unmarked or blank ballot papers shall be deemed to accept the decision on the matter by the Assembly prevent any such mischievous campaign and can look after the less than one per cent of those groups which the Member for Queenstown said were not politically mature enough to understand the issue in a Referendum.

We have been accused in January of wanting to delay the passage of this Bill and thereby avoiding the holding of a Referendum. Now, the Member for Hong Lim has asked that more time be given for him so that he could find out if in other democratic countries like Australia the Referendum Law provides for the determination of the issues by the Government or by the Opposition also. He

wants the Bill to go into a Select Committee. In order that we shall not be accused of wishing to delay the passage of this Bill, we have stated that the Bill can go to a Select Committee if it is the wish of the Opposition. In other words, the Government will abstain.

The Member for Anson was so moved by this gesture of the Government that he exclaimed twice "very fair, very fair". Of course, we must press that the Bill being reported to this House by the end of April. A Select Committee is a matter on which members of the Opposition can please themselves. Barisan Sosialis has denounced this. I am told moreover that the Member for Anson has since been persuaded by Barisan Sosialis to denounce this gesture which he said yesterday was very fair. But now I am told there has been a reversal of the line. The Barisan appendages in this Assembly have made a wrong decision or it might be that an impromptu one which might yet have to be revised. The Opposition can have it any way they like.

As for the complaints of lack of time to consider the amendments, may I point out that all these amendments are as a result of amendments proposed by the Opposition, and in nearly all cases the Government could have moved these amendments in committee stage as amendments to the Oppositions amendments without any notice whatsoever. We have given them notice last Monday and it will be next week before the committee stage is taken. I am therefore completely

unmoved by these charges of unfair practice and of not giving enough time, made either by the Member for Anson or the Member of Queenstown. If they really wish time to consider the amendments, as the Member for Farrer Park has said, they can vote for the motion by the Member for Hong Lim to refer the Bill to a Select Committee.

I say whether in Select Committee or in this Chamber, or in any other public forum we can defend what is fair, what is just. We shall not be deterred from doing what is necessary and what is right. And what is really necessary is to disabuse the minds of the people of Singapore, any section of the people, in this particular case, the Chinese that there is any sell-out to any Malays in the Federation. Merger will take place whether we go through a Referendum or not, and the Secretary-General of the Barisan Sosialis has admitted that again at a recent union meeting. He knows the game is up. They had acted as a catalyst for merger. The issue now is not whether merger takes place or not but how it takes place, for on it depends whether after it has taken place we have a happy society composed of three principal races -- two principal and one minor -- Malays and Chinese about equal numbers and Indians about 15 per cent. If one community believes that the other has deprived it of its rights or somebody has sold it out and that community carries a chip on its shoulders, there will be hatred and bitterness on which the Communists can hope to feed after Malaysia. Our

duty is to ensure that after merger only those who brought trouble on themselves and who now have got it coming would be left embittered, namely the Communists and their stooges in the front organisations. But to the rest, the majority whether Chinese born here or in China, it must be brought home to them that merger is inevitable, in their own interests, for survival and that nobody sold anybody to anyone else. No one is selling Singapore to the Federation, for if there were so, a free gift would have been quickly taken long time ago. It is because of some other basic consideration of maintaining the overall proportions between the various races and communities, of the imbalance that Singapore alone would introduce in the Federation, that Malaysia has been time to coincide with merger. That in itself is proof that Singapore wields a fair proportion and measure of influence in the new Federation as the State with the third largest number of representatives in the Central Parliament.

March 16, 1962.

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(Time issued: 2315 hours)

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