

EXCERPTS OF SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER AT THE 12TH
ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATIONS OF PAP BRANCHES (DISTRICT 8)
ON 18TH DECEMBER, 1966.

Mr. Chairman and comrades,

From time to time, it behoves us to ask ourselves what it is that we have joined together to do. I think from time to time we should remember this: that what we set out to do 12 years ago was to build a country, a society that gives a more equal and a fairer chance to everyone who is a citizen to work, to contribute and to have a good life. Not for the rich to get richer, not for the rich to exploit the poor, but for everyone to have an equal chance to live a decent life.

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Recently, some of my friends in the Trade Unions have said that I have forgotten what they have done for me. I think people who speak in that language do not understand that I did not do it for them.

I used to spend hours arguing on behalf of the unions trying to get them more pay, more fringe benefits, better terms and conditions of employment. Reading them now, they probably thought I did it because I wanted them to help me to win elections. I do not think they understood that I did it because I wanted them to get together, mobilised in a movement that would be strong enough to sweep aside the old system in which the European colonialists and the people with money were able to exploit the whole local community.

So, now they say, "Well, I have helped you; please give me more money". And I say, "Look, please wait until our economy has stabilised." Because we are not sure how this thing is going. In 1965, we broke off from Malaysia; for 1966, we have done reasonably well; and for 1967, there has been no increase in taxes. But they say, "No. Please pay me more. I don't care whether you increase taxes or not"...

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And when they write in their demand, they do not say for how much it is they ask. They just say, "Please revise my salary." But privately, verbally, they say, "One dollar more per person per day" -- which means about \$10 million a year. And they also say, "Back-date it to 1961" -- which means \$60 million.

You know, any Government that gives in to that will pack up Singapore; it will close it down!

But, if we agree to this demand, it means taxes must go up. It must upset the economy. And, what is more important, financiers and investors -- both in the country and outside -- watching this will say, "Look, there is no future. This labour situation is always going to be troublesome. Better open your factory somewhere else. This is a Government which is unable to hold its own people together to make an effort to overcome its difficulties."

I very seriously urge the unions -- and there is still time for them to think very carefully -- that we are not playing games. If I know the economy can take it, I will say, "Look, why not increase the minimum wage from \$4.55, up it to \$5/-? This is good for the country! When parents have more money, they will buy more things for their children, the shops will have more business and money is spinning around."

But, we must be sure that our economy will stabilise. And we have got to do what we know is necessary to ensure that everybody will be left in no doubt that this place has the discipline and the social organisation to make the grade. And, just asking for money without rhyme or reason, without any argument

except “I will go on strike if you don’t give me money” -- that is social indiscipline, anarchy.

In their wage claims, you know, they have not said, “Please give me \$1 because now all employers outside are paying their workers a minimum of \$5.55” and so on. No reason is given. They agree with me that outside people are paying \$3/-. But they still say, “Look, Government last year collected 9% to 12% more in taxes -- pay me”.

So, I would like people including union leaders and union workers, union members to be fully educated. But, unfortunately, many of them do not understand, particularly the union members. The leaders understand but they dare not tell their union members. The Trade Union leaders, the NTUC leaders understand but they too told me, “Please send to arbitration.”

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I said, “You know this is wrong. What do you mean by sending it to arbitration?”. They said, “Well, you know, it is best to send to arbitration. If there is no case, well, there is no case”.

I say that is not leadership. If you know that there is no case, if you know that the country’s future depends upon taking a firm stand and showing the whole

world that Singapore has the courage, has a leadership with enough courage and guts to take a stand -- then you should do it and not pass the buck on.

Well, whatever it is, I say in the end either they are educated and emerge as men fit to be leaders or they will just wither away. And whatever else the PAP lacks, it has never lacked in courage and determination to do what is right.

Finally, I hope we will never forget that we have not formed together in order to have dinners, in order to foster each other's interest. If we do that, very soon you will find that nobody else in Singapore will support you.

People support us because they know what we are doing is good for them and they will only support us as long as they know that sometimes we are prepared to do what is not good for us but good for them. And it is that kind of leadership that the party must always give.

And I would like to believe that over the years, we shall be able to increase the quality of the contribution we will make to our own society in giving them the lead towards this more equal and this more just society.