TRANSCRIPT OF SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER

AT THE 4TH DELEGATES' CONFERENCE OF THE

NATIONAL TRADES UNION CONGRESS, HELD AT THE CONFERENCE HALL, TRADE UNION HOUSE ON

26TH APRIL, 1967.

There has been vast changes in Singapore in the one-and-a-half years since we became independent on our own. This is a new situation. All slogans relevant under old circumstances are a waste of time now. Great victories scored in the past on behalf of the workers or on behalf of the people of Singapore over old enemies are no longer of any value now, other than the experience we have gained from them. For we face new challenges.

Change is the very essence of life. The moment we cease to change, to be able to adapt, to adjust, to respond effectively to new situations, then we have begun to die. I should be loathe to believe that the NTUC is one of those organizations which is dying. It will be a pity because a lot of work went into it. But I will add this: that what we stand for -- not as represented in the NTUC alone but in other associations, bodies and groups -- does not intend to die and will not die.

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The position now in 1967 is vastly improved compared to last year, October 1966 and, even more so, compared to the year before, 1965.

We have identified our problems -- the new ones. We know all the old ones. We have redefined them in so many different ways that everybody is familiar with the new problems. We have not yet succeeded in getting the whole people to get a complete grasp of the problems. But they are with us, identifying, adjusting, thinking, searching for new solutions. And, despite all your shortcomings, the NTUC is also better for the tribulations it has had to go through recently. There is now, at least, an attempt to grasp the realities.

Even if we do nothing, each one of us will change, and so will an organisation managed by a dozen or so people and with some few hundred delegates. Each individual changes. Every experience we go through registers, alters our responses, our assessments of what we want to do the next time.

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Even if we do not change -- which is impossible -- the situation around us, the environment, the policies, the thinking, the ideas, the motivations of the people around us, change.

This is vividly illustrated than by the fact that there is the open invitation to the Government to de-register and to write off all the Communist unions. This is very strange. They have decided, in pursuance of some policy laid down somewhere -- probably quite unrelated to Singapore and our situation -- to abdicate for the time being. It is not that they have decided that workers are not worth organizing and the society is not worth capturing for their Communist systems. But, as a question of tactics, they have abandoned this.

Recently we passed certain amendments to the laws so that only citizens are allowed to control and be members of political parties, similarly, with trade unions. And now you have the Barisan Sosialis and Party Rakyat saying, "We refuse to change. De-register us."

That was a logical consequence of the kind of policies they were pursuing. But I thought, that at least they would want to preserve their ground

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organizations: their unions. But no; the unions also said, "Out with your Trade Union (Amendment) Ordinance. De-register us." It was an open invitation.

What is this for? How long do they want to remain in this withdrawn state.

They must be doing this for their own interests. Whether they are right or wrong that this is in their interests, they must believe that this is in their interests.

Why should this be in their interests? Mind you, they may be making a mistake. But they must obviously believe this gives them advantages.

I think the answer may be as follows: First, withdraw valuable cadres.

These unions are usually really activated, directed, organised by one, two or three persons. If you have four active chaps in the union, it is most remarkable for a union of 1,000 men. They are too valuable: so keep them. I don't believe they have decided suddenly that all this is a waste of time and the four of them are going to join the latest "A-go-go" club!

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What is the reason for this withdrawal and preservation? Obviously, for re-training for some future use.

What happens, meanwhile, to their mass base? They withdraw political activity: there are no denunciations, no active day-to-day campaigning on bread and butter problems..... I can understand because they have said Parliament is a waste of time: they don't want votes..... But they have also decided to abandon

the workers. Never mind about better wages and conditions of living; it is irrelevant. Not irrelevant to the workers but irrelevant to what they want to do. And they must have a reason.

I suggest the reason is this: having decided to preserve their valuable digits, they must either expose and sacrifice a few less valuable digits to keep the ground with them, or let the whole ground go, in order that it shall turn sour and, at some future date -- perhaps five years, perhaps seven or eight -- when it is sufficiently sour enough and fermented long enough, then there will be the massive and spectacular recovery.

There are, probably, subsidiary reasons. But this is what concerns me. Because the ground can go sour.

We must all the time train and build better digits that the cadres they have withdrawn so that when they come back, they will find the world has left them behind.

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But if the NTUC does not occupy all these vast areas of already organised workers and allows the situation to fester -- employers taking advantages of the

situation; victimising, bullying, hiring and firing at will and going back to the bad old days -- then the ferment must take place.

But before the NTUC can do that, it has to get new digits, new instruments with sharp-cutting edges to attack these problems.

I think I can do no better than to remind you what a trade unionist said not so very long ago. He said, "Ah, I used to help this man, Lee. He was our negotiator and adviser. But for me, he would not be in power." Mind you, he said but for him -- not his workers and working class voting for me. In other words, he got all the workers to vote for me; otherwise, I would not have been in power. And he accused me of being ungrateful, of forgetting the services he rendered me, the debt which I owe him and must repay because he helped me into power.

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It is an illustration of the inability of the mind of that generation of leaders to comprehend, to grasp the wider realities!

First, as a statement, it was untrue that he did it; second, even if he had got all his workers to vote for me, it is still untrue that the workers can determine the nature of the government because organized workers constitute one-third of the

whole working population and, of that one-third of the whole working population, half -- or more than slightly more than half now -- are with the NTUC, not just with one single union.

But there is the deeper problem: the inability to see things in more-than-just personal terms -- I help you, you help me; I give you this, you give me this.

What is all this activity about? Why do you think my colleagues and I every year approve a budget of over $400,000 to help finance the Labour Research Unit? I have heard it said by people whose governments do not provide these facilities that that makes you a stooge.

Do I require a stooge? Of what use is a stooge to me?

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Can I fight tough, determined, dedicated intelligent men, if I am surrounded by stooges? Or are my chances of achieving not what I alone want to do, but what a whole group of people in a movement believe is good for Singapore, -- will not those chances of achievement be better if we educate and organise a whole cohort of people who understand, think and have the skill and the determination to meet all these problems?

I don't grudge the $400,000. We could double it, treble it if, in the end, it produces a new crop of leaders. If you are being exploited, they will tell you, these trained minds which you could not otherwise afford to hire. They can tell you what such people are being paid not only in Singapore but around the whole region.

But what concerns me is this: I have noticed that leaders in the trade union field are not over-anxious to see a crop of fresh talent sprouting from the ground, people who, in the nature of things because of our education policy, are bound to be better educated, are bound to be more effective.

It will be invidious if I were to describe what I think has happened, in some unions. I will confine it to my own party, and you can think over what has happened in the unions.

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In the old days, joining the PAP was a very disadvantageous thing to do, socially and economically because you could be discriminated against. Friends, far from admiring you, would say, "You know, this is very foolish and foolhardy. You will get into trouble with the government. You might lose your job. What do you gain in return?"

So by and large, particularly in the middle and lower strata, not many who were successful -- and usually success and intelligence and extra energy go together -- not many of these persons joined us. But there were a number of solid, stalwart types who believed in it and went through with us and stayed with us through thick and thin. Of course, they are honoured party stalwarts.

But life means change. If we just stay with stolid, reliable party stalwarts, we will be unable to meet the new problems.

A whole generation is growing up. By September 1968, next year, when General Elections must be held or three months thereafter, nearly half the voters will be under the age of 30 and all will be educated. There will be no more illiterate people. And in 1973, two-thirds of the electorate would have had, at least, a minimum of eight years schooling.

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What does that mean? It means the old purely emotional responses -- clap, cheer, boo, in accordance with burlesque being performed -- are no longer going to be fashionable.

Quite a number of the union leaders whom I knew of old could barely sign their names. They were the products of the old generation. They had qualities of

leadership: extra amounts of adrenalin and all the other grandular activity that makes people do these things, and some guts to take some risks with their own personal fortunes.

But the younger generation growing up - who will constitute two-thirds of your membership are not going to trust their luck to people who cannot sign their names.... Your member is going to say, "you know, this man tells me all this. But he cannot even read the latest circular that has just been issued and he is laying down the law! But the disparity will be even greater in the emotional responses, in their attitudes, their values.

They are not going to be interested in the Teachers' Union saying "Unified service, uniform pay of salary scales; let's be fair; five-day week," and all this sort of thing. They know nothing about the past, and are not really interested what happened before they grew up. Their attitude will be: "Here are a lot of people who have not done me much good and do not look as if they are capable of ever doing me much good." And so they are going to search for new alternatives -- younger men more in sympathy with their thinking, with their impulses.

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The capacity to anticipate change and, even more important, the determination and the ability to begin to make the changes and adjustments and adaptations now in anticipation of that change which is required, determines how successful we are, not just as individuals but as a group, as representatives of a movement, of a union, of society. This is the crux of life.

We have moved from what was a quiet, trading cum garrison community into a centre of great intellectual ferment with a mass of two million people who will never be able to find meaningful lives, unless our industrialisation programme succeeds, and unless we eventually cease to be dependent on the garrison for our living.

Those of you who work in the War Department know this. It has been coming a long time. It was coming even before Confrontation but Confrontation staved it off. With Confrontation the defence services had to expand and recruit more people.

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Now, Confrontation is over. There is a changed world. And Britain, seeing her role in the context not of today but of the late 1970's, begins the first steps now.

What other changes have there been? We were a society of migrants -- people with no deep attachment to this place. They came here to seek a fortune, that pot of gold at the bottom of the rainbow, in order to go back and buy a nice country estate in Surrey, England, or that nice piece of land in a village in India, or some rank and title from the old Manchus or the KMT and an imposing house in a village in China. Those were the motivations in days past. Singapore could come, could go, it did not really matter. They were only interested in that pot of gold, and interested in the future of Singapore only in so far as it offered them the opportunities to pursue the rewards. When there were no rewards -- as when the recession came in 1929 and the early `30s -- thousands went back to India, or back to Indonesia or back to China.

That has changed, very fundamentally.

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Nobody is here because he believes he has left his homeland where he is not likely to find that pot of gold and he is going to find one here. More and more over the last few years, we have begun to identify our collective interests. If this place goes sour, that is against our collective interests. And who is this "we"? Legally, technically, the definition is "all Singapore citizens" -- those who are born here and bred here, those who have worked here a long time and took citizenship and intend to make this their permanent home.

But often in the actual testing, I observe that the legal definition and the reality, the constitutional definition and the reality, do not coincide.

I know of persons born and bred here. Some of them even in the government service..... Recently, one left who was born and bred here. He is taking his pension, going to Australia to settle there. He is one of those people who could get admitted, and I wish him well. I say, "Good luck to you. May your future and your children's future be blessed."

I know also of those who were not born here but who have taken citizenship. When faced with adversity, as in the case of some of the union leaders who recently got into difficulty, pursuing what I thought was a most unwise course of action, they sent their families back to India. They are Singapore citizens.

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In the course of the next few years that "we" will be defined with greater clarity. And that "we" does not only depend on your being born and bred here or having taken citizenship, but on your conviction that Singapore is your future. It is the people with this conviction who are with me. And I will look after them as

I am quite sure they will help me look after themselves. And we shall look after one another till the end of time.

And I would include in that `we', those who haven't got citizenship because they haven't yet qualified.

I have some very staunch-hearted multi-racialists. They were not born here: they were born in Malaya. They haven't qualified under citizenship rules because they haven't been here long enough. But I have not the slightest doubt that they will go through every adversity and make every sacrifice to ensure that Singapore flourishes and prospers because they have decided, in their hearts, that this is their future.

Why is this important? Because in every-developed country you face this problem of getting people to give of their best, but not for maximum return because you are saving part of the returns for investment into the future. And you will get a man to give of his best knowing that he will put something by for the future if, in fact, his future is here. If his future is not here, it doesn't make sense. He will talk about this, that and the other, and he will say, "Yes, I want this; I want that." Then he will say, "May I have my leave extended, please,

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whilst I tend to my little garden in some other country or make sure that my brother has not swindled me over my farm to which I intend to retire."

Only two under-developed countries in recent times have made this grade into the technological age. The Japanese are one of them. The Chinese are not as advanced industrially as the Japanese..... But, by the time people can split the atom and put rockets on the spot where they want them -- albeit it is only for a few hundred miles -- a lot of effort must have gone in; a lot of wealth must have gone in, wealth obtained by hard work.

So, when you go to these emporiums, and you buy these shirts and big peanuts at half our price, just ask yourself? "Would you do this for your country?" What for? To split the atom and to fire these rockets. And perhaps, later on, put a satellite into space. It is for the future. It is this intense group identity and that attachment -- a permanence between you, your people, and your country -- that alone makes it possible to have this sustained endeavour, continuous strenuous effort without which there can be no breakthrough.

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I suggest that all the time with your own leaders in your unions and also when you have demands from the rank and file, you test by asking yourself: "Is this man interested in Singapore -- in the long-term?" They are interested in

Singapore now because it is doing well. And they are all interested in getting the most out of it. That is a very human thing. But in the long run is he really interested? Because if he is, he will not do the things which will ruin it. Because it will ruin it for his children, or he may even still be alive.

Is he, on the other hand, thinking that there is a better future for him elsewhere either now or at a later date? If he is, I won't say, "Look, let us be rid of him." No! that is foolish. By all means, let him enjoy these things. It does not matter: he is making a contribution to our general growth and our development. But, never put him in position where, in a moment of adversity, when the test comes, when the pressure is on, because he is not rooted and his future is not tied up with this place, his motivations will lead him on to decisions which will sell you out -- you or we whose future is inextricably interwoven with this place, with Singapore, its success, its enduring security.

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Therefore, these problems must occupy a lot of our time -- restless minds searching all the time for a better solution to these problems.

You can easily give up. There are any number of reasons why we can all collapse. You have heard them. We have no large natural resources.

If you do not believe that this is worth the creation, then you sit back. You say, "No, never mind. What the dickens -- whether the factory expands, whether all the vacant sites in Redhill and Jurong will bustle with activity in 10 years. It doesn't matter. Never mind. Let's carry on....."

There are any number of people who can do us in and, in fact, have an almost irresistible impulse to want to do us in if for no other reason than it seems that we are doing alright. This is a fact of life.

Nobody, not even the best computers that man has yet designed, can draw for you a picture of the world at the end of this century, first, because there is no computer or human mind big and capacious enough to take all the data in to work out the end result. Second, because even if you have such a computer, nobody really has the data because once you are doing this, somebody else is planning something else. Although you may think you know his planning, in fact you do not.

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But in the immediate future, as far as we are concerned -- never mind what the shape of Southeast Asia is going to be at the end of this century.... I can see two extremes: either a relatively harmonious, cooperative effort in which constructive endeavour is the order of the day and standards of life are going up

in Southeast Asia and in which we can play a not insignificant part; or, there is a great deal of manipulation of this region by governments or nations or peoples with larger economic resources than any of these nations can ever hope to acquire either for ideological or purely selfish national ends. These are the two extremes.....

Whichever way it goes, our position in this Southeast Asia -- whose geography is unlikely to change -- will be immeasurably strengthened if we have well-educated, well-trained, well-organised trade unions, community associations, political groups to act cohesively and effectively in pursuance of our collective interests.

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