STATEMENT BY THE PRIME MINISTER AFTER MEETING REPRESENTATIVES OF THE NTUC AND SERVICES UNIONS ON TUESDAY, 18TH JULY, 1967.

I have acquainted the unions with the dimensions of the problems involved between now and 1971 and the further reductions between `71 and the middle `70s. I have discussed the matter frankly with all the leaders concerned. I do not think glossing over the severity of the cuts will do anyone any good.

Both the Government and the unions are agreed that this problem must be faced intelligently and sensibly to minimise dislocation and maximise the opportunities for conversion to civilian use of the base facilities as they become redundant. There will be close consultations between the unions and the Labour Ministry to ensure that the principles on which redundancy has been agreed are faithfully and impartially administered.

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Our future depends upon our capacity to discipline and organise our community so that they can make the adjustments required. We must brace our people up to meet the changes that are coming. Our paramount duty is to protect the collective interests of all those who have nowhere but Singapore to look to for their future.

If in 1971 a sane, stable and secure position is achieved, the chances of our successfully overcoming the second half of the problem will be assured. The Government will make every effort to ensure that Singapore citizens who become redundant as a result of defence cuts are given every opportunity to be retrained for civilian jobs. But I have explained to the unions that it is not easy to convert a 45-year-old clerical worker into a 46-year-old skilled tradesman.

Date: 18th July, 1967.

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