

ADDRESS BY THE PRIME MINISTER, MR. LEE KUAN YEW,
AT THE SEMINAR ON COMMUNISM AND DEMOCRACY,
WEDNESDAY, 28TH APRIL, 1971

POLITICS, ECONOMICS, SECURITY AND YOUR FUTURE

In your eleven and a half years in school, my colleagues and I have been trying to give you the kind of education which will prepare and equip you for your part in making Singapore a better place to live in. If you have done your share of work, including extra-curricular activities, you will find life in Singapore a rewarding challenge.

For six years, 1959 to 1965, we planned on the basis of a Singapore which would be together with Peninsular Malaya. On August 9, 1965, we became independent on our own. We had to make fundamental changes in our political, social and security policies. Most important of all education had to be geared differently to prepare you for a different way of life. We knew that there would have to be considerable co-operation with Malaysia in security matters. But we knew economic co-operation would be slow on developing. There would be less and less entrepot trade. We had to concentrate more on manufacturing, mostly

for exports to world markets. So we would require less clerks and shopkeepers, but more technicians, engineers and executives.

I have put the subjects -- politics, economics and security -- in the order of their importance to your future. Without a stable political situation and a rational and realistic political leadership, there can be no economic development. There will be little investment in factories, few jobs, massive unemployment, and a dangerous internal security position. And without a thriving economy, you need not worry about defending the homes that you have not built, and the wealth that you have not created.

Unfortunately, this is too true of many new countries. The political situation is confused, and the support of a poorly educated people is sought by emotional appeals, not rational argument. After a new government is elected, its promises cannot be fulfilled. Then violence results from frustration.

New countries, like Singapore, face many problems: a lack of the instruments for effective government, not enough trained administrators, engineers, technicians, not enough capital, and scarce technological expertise. Further poor organisation of whatever meagre trained manpower there is, makes

the problem worse. But, given tough-minded and honest political leadership, these problems can be slowly overcome.

In established societies in the West, like Britain, a system of government has gone on unchanged, or changing only gradually, for over three centuries. They have developed a large number of people who, whilst fighting for their personal or sectional interests, have made a habit of putting their country's interest above their own. They have learned from experience that without national security and a strong economy, their own interests will be lost. They have developed the reflexes necessary for group survival as against individual survival.

In times of grave crises -- as in the Second World War -- they joined to form a national government, sinking their party rivalries to make sure that the nation survived.

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New countries do not have this continuing hard core of people to provide for continuity in political leadership. Worse, they do not even have enough political leaders with any understanding of their economy, and what to do to generate economic growth.

The first generation leaders are the men who had led their people to independence. They seldom understand that government means more than just mobilising mass support for protest against the injustices of colonialism. After independence they cannot deliver the goods. They had not learned about administration and economic growth. They are not able to create confidence in a government's promises and undertakings. They cannot get foreign investments to add to domestic capital. Then they have not educated and trained their young in the skills and disciplines which can use this capital and machinery to bring about the better life.

Worse, when the first generation leaders pass away, there are no successors who have made it a practice of placing the national interest above their own. They worry more about their own future than that of the people. They then decide to make provisions for their own personal future. The result is a further decline in the economy, and a deterioration of the social order.

In 1945 the British cut Singapore off from the Straits Settlements of Penang and Malacca, which were put into Malaya. The British wanted to hold us as a military base for as long as they could. They made a grave mistake. By 1963, when we rejoined Malaya in Malaysia, a way of government had become

so established in Malaya, that the changes and accommodation necessary, with Singapore as part of the Federation, were not acceptable to Malaysia.

We have to live with what has happened. Events which took place before you were born, in 1945, and again in 1948, when the Malayan Communist Party staged its revolt in an armed bid for power, have shaped our destiny. You have inherited the past, including the mistakes and the successes of those before you.

There is as yet no large core of people in Singapore to provide the reflexes for national, as against individual survival. We must make a habit of putting group interests first and personal interests next. Singaporeans must become more conscious that their very existence as a distinct people, in a poor and troubled Asia, depends upon our ability to re-act quickly and in unity to defend our interests.

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Many are too young to remember how bad things were. They take for granted Singapore's orderly progress and continuing prosperity as the natural order of things. Those who do remember, know that our present stability and prosperity have been built upon the cohesion, the determination and the planning of a small band of men. We are succeeding in creating a developed, albeit a

small, nation. Singapore has a good chance of continuing to be a successful nation if the next generation understands the ingredients of success:

First, a stable political situation.

Second, a well-educated and trained population, ready to work and pay for what it wants.

Third, the ability to attract higher-level technology industries.

Fourth, better standards of life and in a cleaner, greener and more gracious Singapore.

Fifth, the competence of our defence forces to ensure that no one believes he can just walk in and take over what we have created and built.

The main burden of present planning and implementation rests on the shoulders of some 300 key persons. They include key men in the P.A.P., M.P.'s and cadres who mobilise mass support and explain the need for policies even when they are temporarily inconvenient or against sectional interests.

Outstanding men in civil service, the police, the armed forces, chairmen of

statutory boards and their top administrators -- they have worked the details of policies set by the government and seen to its implementation. These people come from poor and middle-class homes. They come from different language schools. Singapore is a meritocracy. And these men have risen to the top by their own merit, hard work and high performance. Together they are a closely-knit and co-ordinated hard core. If all the 300 were to crash in one jumbo jet, then Singapore will disintegrate. That shows how small the base is for our leadership in politics, economics and security. We have to, and we will, enlarge this base, enlarging the number of key digits.

It is strange, but true, that the fate of millions often turns around the quality, strength and foresight of the key digits in a country. They decide whether a country gains cohesion and strength in orderly progress, or disintegrates and degenerates into chaos.

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In the Second World War, Winston Churchill and a small group of men around him gave a whole nation the courage and resolution to fight against insurmountable odds. He triumphed and Britain triumphed. Today, in Britain, a new generation of leaders is trying to find a similar formula for national unity and collective endeavour, for her position in the top league of major developed nations under vastly changed world-conditions. This leadership consists of

several men of ability and determination. But they must also have the capacity to inspire their people to unite for a national cause, to place trade union and sectional interests second to national interests.

De Gaulle succeeded in re-making France into a coherent nation after the shambles of defeat in the Second World War. The dissension between bickering political parties in the years from 1945 to 1958 resulted in the unhappy spectacle of unstable and short-lived coalition governments, with no long-term or consistent policies. Finally they were near civil war, as they got embroiled in Algeria for the sake of one million white French-Algerians. The recovery to the prosperity and progress France now enjoys, owes a great deal to de Gaulle, his leadership, and the group of leaders around him, who, even now after de Gaulle, chart the destiny of France.

Let me explain one special feature about Singapore. Our population is mixed. Even the majority community, 76% Chinese, is composed of different groups: the older generation are dialect-speaking. Then we have the Chinese-educated and the English-educated. Next, we have Malays, Indians, Ceylonese and Eurasians. They have different languages, religions and cultures. It is not easy to get these various groups to see politics alike. But the government has to

reconcile different views and get people to support policies to further the interests of all.

There can be few places in the world where it is necessary for senior Cabinet Ministers to read three sets of newspapers every morning, one in Malay, two in Chinese and three in English.

In the past few months, a Malay newspaper has been talking of nothing but Malay problems, and advocating "bumiputra" policies. One Chinese newspaper, on the other hand, has been playing up pro-Chinese Communist news, and working up Chinese language issues. It is worth noting that this newspaper does not do this in its Malaysian edition. But the line taken by this paper has forced the other major Chinese paper to compete in drumming up chauvinistic and xenophobic sentiments. The English press, particularly one English language newspaper, financed by capital from obscure sources nominally from Hong Kong, has been playing upon "with-it"-ism -- permissiveness in sex, drugs and dress styles. On national service, whilst giving lip-service support, this newspaper worked up a campaign to fault it on every count.

These three newspapers set off three different pulls in three contrary directions. Unless checked, they will tear Singapore society asunder. Any

government of Singapore that does not keep these divisive and disruptive activities in check, is guilty of dereliction of duty.

We must get the next generation on to more common ground to build their future upon. We must give our children roots in their own language and culture, and also the widest common ground through a second language, on which all can compete equally.

A growing number of students are now bilingual. A difficult problem is how to raise the standards of teaching of the second language so that even without the help of a strong family background, a student can be effective in two languages -- his mother tongue and English. More and more parents are realising that this must be so.

To achieve this, one of my Chinese-educated Cabinet colleagues has his children in an English school, confident that the Chinese they learn in school can be strengthened in a Chinese-speaking home. Another one, who is Chinese and English-educated, has sent one child to an English school and another to a Chinese school. Three English-educated Cabinet Ministers have sent their children to Chinese schools, confident that the English lessons in Chinese schools plus the home environment can give them a command of English. So also with

many Parliamentary Secretaries and M.P.s, and even senior civil servants, and principals and teachers themselves.

Moreover, those M.P.s, Parliamentary Secretaries and Ministers who are not bilingual, have been learning a second language, to do their jobs properly.

When the Chairman of the Public Service Commission, who is English-educated and dialect-speaking at home, sends his son to a Chinese school where they teach English, you can draw your own conclusions. He is in charge of our manpower problems, and he more than anyone else ought to know what is the best way to prepare our students for the future.

In the course of the next few years, our schools must be able to make students effectively bilingual, whatever the language spoken at home, and whatever the language stream school a student goes to.

Unfortunately progress towards this end has been too slow. Recently the Minister for Education has had to allow Chinese school principals to use their discretion to teach Mathematics and Science in Chinese or English, because there are not enough teachers in Chinese schools who can teach Mathematics and Science in English.

In the English schools, the teaching of History and Civics in Chinese has had to be postponed because the prescribed text-books were too difficult for the age groups in Primary III and IV.

But these problems must and will be overcome. These policies for effective bilingualism will be implemented. The teaching of Malay and Tamil in English schools will also be improved.

Then we shall have less problems in reconciling different values and attitudes. Then we shall become more cohesive a people, all rooted in their traditional values, culture and languages, but effective in English, a key to the advanced technology of the West, from where nearly all our new and more advanced industries come. These new factories making cameras, electrical and electronic products, chemicals and pharmaceuticals are providing the better paid jobs to technicians, engineers and executives. Japan learned and borrowed her technology from the West. Even China, today, has to buy her aeroplanes and sophisticated heavy machines from Russia or the West.

If our political situation remains stable, if we do not allow communists or opportunists to upset the prevailing confidence in the future of Singapore, then there will be rapid economic progress. Western industrialists will invest in

Singapore, exporting to us not goods, but factories, and with the factories, the technological knowledge and skills to make sophisticated products. This is the way to better jobs, better homes, better schools, hospitals, dental clinics, parks and recreation centres. Then we can afford to pay for our security, through well trained national servicemen under high calibre, professional combat, and staff officers using highly sophisticated and expensive weapons. All this requires leadership, a well educated, well trained and disciplined population. Sound politics leads to good economic development, which in turn results in healthy social conditions and the wherewithal to ensure our security and your future.

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