

TRANSCRIPT OF THE QUESTION-AND-ANSWER SESSION
FOLLOWING THE ADDRESS TO THE 20TH GENERAL ASSEMBLY
OF THE INTERNATIONAL PRESS INSTITUTE AT HELSINKI
BY THE PRIME MINISTER, ON 9TH JUNE, 1971

CHAIRMAN: We have just heard a fascinating, exonerating and provocative statement about the press. Are there some questions for Mr. Lee?

HAROLD EVANS (Editor of the SUNDAY TIMES, London): Many of us have known Mr. Lee and admire him for what he has done -- the achievements Singapore has made -- but, nonetheless, somewhat disturbed by recent events. I speak now not as somebody who is connected with Singapore politics or Singapore business interests, but, I hope, as a friend of Singapore and a professional newspaperman. I like to ask Mr. Lee to answer a question on news management. One of this depends on his fascinating analysis of the two systems of power.

While I accept, as anybody who heard my talk this morning on race relations would know, the necessity to avoid divisive tendencies which I think should be a self-policing exercise by newspapers, I like to ask Mr. Lee why it has been necessary from time to time to censor by the back-door, not really explosive things like race relation, but simple matters of news. Now, I could give a number of

instances of this which have disturbed me and disturbed other professional journalists. For instance, one of them is being quoted in the SINGAPORE HERALD in May 1971, which was when a woman called Dr. Shirle Gordon who was to be evicted as undesirable and the newspapers were reporting this account. SINGAPORE HERALD was warned by the Prime Minister's Press Secretary, Mr. Li Vei-chen, who told the newspaper not to print the story. The newspaper felt that it was news since lots of people were going to see this woman being evicted. They said they have to make a judgement here, they were determined not to make a storm and a spectacle out of this. So they printed the news and the result was, the HERALD was denied press releases and barred from press conferences.

Now, there may be something more sinister about this woman's expulsion than I have read, but that, coupled with the inability of there being a debate on the abolition of the old jury system or the failure of the STRAITS TIMES to report the resignation of the former Chief Minister, Mr. David Marshall, from the Presidential Council, in 1970. These don't seem to me, with respect, to be the kind of things which a government can legitimately want to manage in the interest of a stable and a developing society which I, too, would like to see. So I just like to ask Mr. Lee if he can justify this day-to-day news management of such matters.

PRIME MINISTER: Mr. Chairman, first of all, I think the statement that Mr. Marshall's resignation from the Presidential Council in 1970 was not reported, I think, is incorrect. Well, it was reported in the STRAITS TIMES. It was also reported in full why he resigned, and I think it just was not accurate to say that. I do not concede the statement that the abolition of the jury system was not accompanied by considerable press reporting. The Bill, which was introduced by my colleague, the Minister for Law -- himself a member of one of the Inns of Court -- was sent to the Select Committee, in which, over a period of four months, both professional interests of lawyers and laymen were listened to and recorded, verbatim, and published in the complete report of the Select Committee and reported back to Parliament. Mr. Marshall, himself, who was one of the keenest supporters of the jury system appeared before the Select Committee in which I, myself, was a member and had the opportunity to ask him, if I remember rightly, how many murder cases he had defended. He said over a hundred, and I asked how many convictions, and he said only one. I congratulated him upon his forensic ability. And all these were duly reported in the STRAITS TIMES. That it was not carried by the news agencies as a matter of interest to editors like Mr. Evans of the SUNDAY TIMES, I think is a matter for regret. But I am quite sure if Mr. Evans shows this kind of interest, we would put him on our mailing list both for Hansard and for any other matters of general news interest.

I am not quite sure about Miss Shirle Gordon. I don't particularly remember what my Press Secretary did or did not do on these occasions. But it may interest Mr. Evans to know that she is an American citizen, who was trained in Beirut to be a CIA operator, was unsuccessful, but married a series of Malaysian politicians. Eventually married one of our agents in Singapore and went off to the Philippines. The marriage had broken down and we saw no reason why her undesirable activities should continue in Singapore, and we decided that she would be excluded from Singapore and so she was, as I think it was our right to do so. Her refusal of re-entry because she kept her American citizenship, in spite of marriage to a Singapore Muslim who was working for us, was a matter which I would have thought might get two lines in a major newspaper, interested in Southeast Asia. But certainly I would not wish Television Singapore to take a picture of her making a scene at the Causeway. I think the whole intention was to try and picture herself as an outraged and badly treated American woman, and I do not see that it was the duty of Radio Singapore to lend itself to such activities.

As for the HERALD, that's a long story. I think it started in 1969, when a former half-politican, half-newspaperman wanted to start a newspaper and we were anxious at that time to have an English newspaper to liven things up, and have a new kind of climate to educate the ever-growing numbers of English-educated students, who are being churned out in our schools, both in the English-language schools and

the Chinese-language schools. But it was subsequently discovered that it was in fact financed, not by Singaporeans, but it is now said to be a Malaysian. There is no proof in fact if it's a particular Malaysian, former Chief Minister, I mean he does not appear anywhere in the list of shareholders, neither in the SINGAPORE HERALD'S which is registered in Singapore, nor does his name appear in the company which holds the largest block of shares in the HERALD, the Heeda Limited in Hong Kong. And I think if Mr. Evans is interested in pursuing this matter further, he would take advantage of a news conference which I hope to have tomorrow morning at 11, to which I have invited Mr. Meyer, the Director of the IPI, who has shown some interest in the matter and has made quite a number of statements and to whom I have asked quite a number of questions, and Miss Aw Sian, Chairman of IPI who I think confused her position as Chairman of the IPI and as loser of some S\$500,000 in the HERALD.

HAROLD EVANS: Just one point to explain why I made the statement about the jury system. It was because Mr. David Marshall wrote to me in London and said: "I cannot get this criticism published in Singapore, will you publish it in London." So I did.

PRIME MINISTER: Well, I think Mr. Marshall suffers from almost an irresistible compulsion to read of himself in the newspapers. And from time to time,

he does get the satisfaction of seeing himself in print, not always in the most flattering light. But I think it is quite untrue that this matter was not aired. In fact, if I remember, I think he also held a public meeting which was rather poorly attended.

IMMANUAEL BIRNBAUM (Sueddeutsche Zeitung, Munich): Mr. Chairman, I only have one question to ask the Prime Minister of Singapore.

If you allow me this quotation of a public speech of the Foreign Minister of your Government. My quotation is from a letter of our colleagues in Singapore of the Foreign Press Association, written to your Foreign Minister. The answer is very short -- four lines -- and did not deny that he made this remark. He said, as from our colleagues in Singapore, that "some newsmen may be just newsmen. But there are also those who play less innocent roles. The very nature of their profession lends itself easily and conveniently to consciously play the role of agents in black operations or be unwittingly used for such purposes."

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Mr. Prime Minister, you have kindly accepted the invitation to address this main organisation of newsmen and publicly address us in Helsinki. Will you agree with this remark of the Foreign Minister -- that by the very nature of our profession, we are lending to black operations or do you not agree to this remark?

PRIME MINISTER: Mr. Chairman, I have never been a journalist like my colleague, the Foreign Minister, or Mr. Birnbaum. Therefore, I do not know what temptations there lie in the profession of journalism. But I do remember reading a CBS correspondent recently saying in America that he was approached by the CIA to work for them. So I really don't know. I can only take what other journalists tell me to be the case.

TERKEL TERKELSEN (Berlingske Tidende, Copenhagen): I have no financial interest in Singapore. I speak purely from a journalistic point of view. And I agree with you that you have chosen the right time to come to Helsinki, particularly in view of the events that have taken place in Singapore. I do not know whether you want to regard this as a dress rehearsal for tomorrow's conference or whether you want to answer the question straightaway. I am talking more particularly about the case of the SINGAPORE HERALD, which, according to a statement by its Chief Editor published in the HERALD, was denied press releases and barred from press conferences. All official news sources were switched off, that government organisations cancelled all advertisements, and that finally the licence to print was withdrawn. I think that quite a number of my colleagues would be interested to hear a little more about these affairs.

PRIME MINISTER: I would not try to postpone answering this question till tomorrow. But I'd like to go into the details tomorrow, because I don't think those of you who are interested in general principles would like to go into the ramifications of the financial control of the newspaper.

When my colleague, the Foreign Minister, who was a journalist, was approached by Mr. Francis Wong, who was once half a politician and half a journalist, to start a newspaper, he said "yes" and I said, "Well, all right, whose money?" He said he was going to get some local funds. I said, "Well, probably can make a go of it, if it is run properly." Our State trading corporation -- which handles vast sums of money because we do our trading with communist countries on a State basis, so as to protect ourselves from getting our citizens made patrons or being patronised by state trading corporations with the communist countries -- was asked to invest in this. And they calculated that it would require something like six million dollars, which is about over two million U.S. dollars and sustained effort of some two to three years before the newspaper could break even and then, from then onwards begin to make money. I became suspicious, for a number of reasons, as to the financing of this paper and also the curious line it was taking. And I therefore decided to test whether it was a newspaper out to make a business venture of itself -- because it was foreign capital which was controlling it, not Singapore capital -- and so decided that they will not enjoy official patronage which I think is within the

prerogative of any government -- to either give or withhold advertisements and news.

This led the paper to a highly exposed position because it was losing money faster than it could afford. And this led, at the beginning of this year, to the dismissal of the editor by the man who claims that he is this unknown company in Hong Kong and to the stepping into the paper of Miss Aw Sian with half a million dollars. I think it is the duty of any government of Singapore to ensure that no mass media controlled by outside capital should masquerade as the voice of the people of Singapore.

I have no objections to USIS, BIS, British Information Service, Tass, the Russian Embassy, Tanjug and everybody else putting out their statements as that of the United States Information Services or as that of the Russian Government. But to have a newspaper in which insidiously day by day, -- perhaps those of you who are Finnish will understand this better than those of you who are not in such a position -- that really it is futile and foolish to try and have a defence force against such overwhelming odds around oneself. That, I do not accept, nor will I allow any foreign capital to plug that line in Singapore.

I think Singapore is going to thrive. I think it will prosper and survive, provided there is the will and cohesiveness of a united people. The undermining of that will, the erosion of that will to fight for what we have built and created out of swampland is something I do not allow any foreign capital to do. Whether it is

Malaysia, in the case of Heeda & Company belonging to Mr. Donald Stephens, the present High Commissioner for Malaysia in Canberra; or Miss Aw Sian who holds a British passport and says it is her \$500,000 which she has lost. And I believe any government in Singapore that didn't do what I did would be failing in its duty.

E.J.B. ROSE (Westminster Press, London): I would like to ask Mr. Lee Kuan Yew about the manager and the three journalists of the NANYANG who had been detained without trial, whether he means to bring them to trial as according to the charges against them, the evidence of their behaviour which you complained of, is all on the record, in the NANYANG. In most civilised countries, when journalists are put in prison for what they have written and for the policy of their paper, they are given a chance to defend themselves. I only hope that yours is a civilised country.

PRIME MINISTER: Mr. Rose, you had the privilege of visiting Singapore in 1960, and I hope you didn't find it too uncivilised. I don't know if you have been back since. Since you had visited Singapore, you will understand that certain issues are explosive issues. And when you work up a considerable amount of steam on language, culture, education -- pride of things Chinese in China -- in a multi-racial situation, that's heading for a collision.

In some countries in Southeast Asia, you play the majority line and suppress the minority. In Singapore, I think we take some considerable pride in the fact that we suppress or punish majority exhibitionism in the interest of minority rights. At some later date, when we have a more equable mood I am consulting my lawyers amongst other things for an action for damages. Because amongst the other things I have been called is -- I don't know if there are any Chinese in the audience who would understand this --- (a second red-haired devil), i.e., a stooge man of the West. It's a phrase which arose from the Boxer rebellion for those who helped the foreigners. I and my Chinese colleagues in the Cabinet have also been called -- 'people who have forgotten their ancestors', and this particular phrase is a very vicious one in the Chinese language: it's called (you count the pieces but you have forgotten your ancestors). All this was written by two former KMT journalists -- one used to work for the Central News Agency, the other is the son-in-law of the last Consul of China in Kuala Lumpur, before the Communists took over. Why they should both suddenly take a pro-communist line, and publish, on the instructions of the managing director of the company, only the favourable parts of Western news agencies' reports on China and stoke a great deal of heat on language, education, culture in a multi-racial situation is something which I think my government must pursue.

First, we show firmness in order that there are no riots, no acts of violence. At a later date, we will solve and sort out the other niceties of the legality of the thing -- criminal libel if what he said is true. I believe what was said is untrue because the man who wrote that, sent five of his sons to be educated in Australia. I have my own children educated in Chinese in Singapore. So I think it will be rather dangerous, in any court of Law, to say that I have forgotten my ancestors or that I am out to kill Chinese education, language and culture. Which, of course, would mean my losing the next election if that's believed by the majority of the population. But these are niceties.

First and foremost, the person temporarily responsible for the good government in Singapore in such a situation must show firmness of government -- that we shall not allow such things to be published, and would like to know why anti-communist men, basically anti-communist, have suddenly become flushed with money and are taking this very strange line. And the investigations are continuing.

As for the legality of the arrest and so on, as you know, there is a habeas corpus proceedings going on at this moment in Singapore. So I don't want to comment on the other subjects relevant to the habeas corpus proceedings.

But I think Mr. Rose who've been to Singapore ... I am not particularly concerned whether if you were to visit it tomorrow, you'd find it a civilised society or not, but I feel reasonably sure that as a result of what we have done in the last 12 years of office, we have made it a more civilised place than large chunks of the rest of South and Southeast Asia.

E.J.B. ROSE: May I just have the privilege to pursue this question a little further? I was in Singapore last April, and I have seen the progress which has been made, the material progress. The Prime Minister hasn't really answered my question: whether he intends to bring these men to trial. I asked this question because there is a journalist who has been in Changi jail since 1963, without trial.

PRIME MINISTER: He is not in Changi jail, Syed Zahari, you mean?

E.J.B. ROSE: Yes.

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PRIME MINISTER: Well, he was a member of my party, when we were a united front with the communists. He was a communist; I was not. We both knew that when the battle for independence was over, there would be a battle as to what kind of independence Singapore was going to have. And he is not in jail because he is a journalist. And I think Mr. Rose, you know that as well as other people do. I

mean, those who'd been to Singapore. He is there because he is one of the leading members of the Malayan communist organisation. And it is no longer news to report their activities, but two weeks ago, a bomb exploded on the front door of the Supreme Court of Singapore, and this is going on. It is not a very effective bomb because they haven't quite learned how to manipulate plastic materials yet. And I think it would be very foolish to believe, that releasing these men in the name of humanity would necessarily lead to a more civilised situation in Singapore.

CHAIRMAN: We are running very short of time. The next session is now overdue to begin. Are there one, two more questions that people would like to ask?

MICHEL CORDEY (France-Soir, Paris): Mr. Prime Minister, I have never had the privilege of visiting Singapore. Sorry about it. I am just asking you a short question so that I don't overburden the administrative schedule of this institution. My question is this. I have listened with great care to your explanations and answers to my colleagues. And it is my impression that in the present situation of Singapore, with its complex problems that you have, with the threats from different sides and also with the positive achievements that you want to have, you cannot apply presently in Singapore, the normal roles of freedom of expression; expression of controversial opinions which hurt you; personal guarantees for journalists, both from

Singapore and abroad who write or print things detrimental to your concept of government. In other words, you are presently that is my question -- under a sort of martial law -- situation where for reasons of state, the elementary freedoms of the press do not exist any more.

PRIME MINISTER: Chairman, No, I think that would not describe the situation in Singapore at all. There, the population is divided, as I explained, in different ethnic, linguistic and cultural and religious groups. Now, with the sophisticated English-educated --- those who have been in high school and universities and who are by and large familiar with Western styles and forms of dissent -- they are not violent nor terrorist organised outfits, a considerable amount of latitude, leeway is allowed, because no damage is done to the social fabric. With the 14% Malays who are Muslims, any sensitive mishandling of language or religion leads to an explosion, and so, anybody unfamiliar with it is told to lay off language and religious issues affecting the Malays.

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Now, with the majority of the Chinese population, namely, first generation migrants, and those who have been completely Chinese-educated and who are not familiar with Western like styles or forms of parliamentary democracy, -- you would be surprised to know how vehement and virulently I am attacked everyday both by the underground press and by the clandestine radio station, which we and the

government in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, believe is somewhere about 1,700 to 2,000 miles north of us. Now in that particular case, any suggestion that the Chinese majority in Singapore will find themselves emasculated culturally or linguistically must lead to an explosive and riotous situation. Hence, the handling of the case of the four journalists of the NANYANG SIANG PAU referred to by Mr. Rose. I mean, they were playing on the Chinese language and it needed different treatment.

In the case of the HERALD, when they ran out of money and they knew it was time running out on them, they had a riotous fortnight in which every vitriolic and in some cases puerile and asinine criticism and attacks were allowed. And they had free play. They claimed their circulation went up four-fold. We knew they didn't sell them. They gave most of them away.

A different style was allowed because it was playing to an audience which was not by its nature likely to explode. So if you ask me: is this a dangerous military situation? I'll say no but it has got its pitfalls and landmines, cultural landmines. Those who handle the mass media in Singapore and report on it, and have done for long periods of time, are usually familiar with them. On the whole, I would say the situation is tranquil, reasonably relaxed. It may not be believed, but from time to time I am compelled by law to put myself at the disposal of the populace, on the basis of one man one vote, regardless of language, education or

culture. I have done this for three times and won. And, in fact, last year in April, in order to inject new and younger members into Parliament, five of our older M.P.s. resigned and we won all five parliamentary by-elections.

So if you ask me whether it is a highly volatile situation, I say, no. But there are certain sensitive areas, with each particular linguistic group. The Chinese-educated are watching Chinese-educated people in neighbouring countries being emasculated culturally and linguistically. The Chinese in Indonesia are forced to give up their names and take Indonesian names. So these are highly explosive issues. Chinese schools are dying in Malaysia because no state subsidy or grant is allowed to Chinese schools. Now, that's not so in Singapore, because if you try to do that, then you will lose the next election, apart from the fact that I believe it's wrong to deculturise the people. There is the practical politics of not doing to your majority base, what you know they regard as absolutely fundamental. And as I have said, I also happen to agree with it, that you make for a better man if he knows his cultural past and has a lifeline to his past, particularly because we are a migrant community. And so my answer is no simplistic yes or no. I think it's a fairly relaxed society. A lot of stuff has been printed by the newspapers abroad, they have all come back to Singapore and been read by Singaporeans without any untoward disturbance, and I feel reasonably confident that that situation will prevail, provided

certain specific areas of sensitivity are not exploited. And if they are, then the government must intervene.

MICHEL GORDEY: In that case, Sir, just a short remark. I think that your situation is very complex, but it still reminds me, after 29 years of the exercise of my profession, that the easiest solution for a government is to take strong control of the mass media and jail for two or three days, like in my country France, some unpleasant journalists and thereby "avoid explosive situations". Thank you, Sir.

PRIME MINISTER: May I just be allowed to make a response to that. I don't think there has been any place in South and Southeast Asia where a social democratic group went into a united front with the communists, then broke from them and fought them on radio and on television for hearts and minds, and won that battle for hearts and minds, won it in a referendum, won it in a subsequent general election in 1963, before it put the leaders who lost the election away. This is the tragedy of the social democrats -- that if I lose and my communist opponents win, I am dead. And if I win and they lose, I got to keep them alive.

L.K.JAKANDE (Nigerian Tribune, Lagos): Mr. Chairman, I would like to ask three brief questions of the Prime Minister.

Just now, the Prime Minister told us what an explosive situation exists in Singapore, although he says they are not strictly explosive. May I ask whether in Singapore there are any laws of libel or sedition under which people could be arrested and tried, and if found guilty, convicted. If there are, may I ask why these have not been applied.

My second question: Is there any law in Singapore, Mr. Prime Minister, which forbids foreign capital from operating newspapers. If there is, then why was foreign capital allowed in the first place. And if there is not, is it a proper thing to seize or to make it impossible for the printer to publish newspapers after it has been invested there?

My third question: I was delighted to hear the Prime Minister saying that he holds temporary responsibility for the government of Singapore. Does he accept the view that the party in power in any country, new or old, does not possess the monopoly of patriotism, and the people although not at the moment in power are as patriotic, or could be as patriotic as those in power, and that their ideas of development and progress could be even better than those in power?

PRIME MINISTER: Can I answer in reverse order because it's probably more fresh in our minds. First, I concede the last proposition immediately. I think if that is

not conceded by my colleagues and I, then change in Singapore will come by violence. Unless we concede that a contrary point of view, espoused by equally patriotic Singaporeans can be expounded to the people and accepted and voted for by the majority of the people, then the alternative must mean either a military coup or an armed uprising, which is something that I do not relish.

The second question -- may I -- investment. Yes, unfortunately we have not had such prohibitions against foreign capital coming in. It had not been necessary because the question never arose. In fact, several years ago, in order to get more life injected into the English-language newspapers in Singapore, I tried to persuade Lord Thomson to start a newspaper in Singapore. And he was not particularly keen because the other paper was too well established and it needed considerable amount of resources.

I think the answer to this problem is not to exclude foreign capital or expertise, which New Zealand decided to do when the Thomson group was about to take over New Zealand newspapers. Because if we did that, then we would have lifeless and unattractive newspapers. I think if it were possible what we should try and achieve is the division between (1) financial and organisational control of the business side of a newspaper which may be in the hands of foreign investors, and (2) the editorial and sub-editorial control of the newspaper which should be in a board or

group of trustees of people who are imminently going to be loyal to the country and will not want to undermine it because they will be undermining their own future.

And if something along those lines could be worked out, then I think foreign capital and expertise would be useful in giving Singapore newspapers the kind of filling which has given Singapore industries. I mean, it is not just capital alone which is necessary because the capital is there in Singapore in fair abundance. There is a great deal of capital from the whole region seeking refuge in numbered accounts in Singapore. The problem is one of expertise. How do you put out a good newspaper? How do you make it pay? How do you get the circulation to go up? How do you get your advertisements in? How do you break even? In other words, we not only allow foreign capital, in fact, a great number of foreigners are working as journalists, not in the local page but in the foreign news page. From time to time, of course, it is very difficult for them to see that their job really is just to present foreign news page nicely and not to try to influence the local news pages. And recently, one Australian who was supposed to be in charge of the foreign news page of the SINGAPORE HERALD wanted to decide what the editorial policy should be on local matters and the editor told my colleague, the Foreign Minister, he had accepted the latter's resignation with alacrity because he thought it was not right for the man to tell him, a Singaporean, what he should write, and we decided the best thing to do in the circumstances is not to allow him to continue to work in Singapore.

Now, your first question is on the law of sediton, law of criminal libel or civil libel. The answer is yes. But I think you know that when you get into a communal situation, where you get conflicts between race versus race versus race or language versus language, to bring it into open court and regurgitating the communal poison only makes the matter worse. I have personal experience of this because I appeared myself on so many occasions in sedition trials on behalf of accused persons and not unsuccessfully, with fairly skillful and experienced teachers like Pritt, Q.C. I learned how one could turn a sedition trial into a real political trial. And it does the country no good at all.

I think the first thing we want to do, is to put a bit of cold water on it and cool it off. When it's cooled off and reason prevails, I can assure our friend from Nigeria that, as I have said, I think the newspaper which is a very wealthy one, worth at least about US\$5 million, could well afford to pay my colleagues and me some solace for the harm they have done to me.

CHAIRMAN: Now, ladies and gentlemen, we must discontinue because there is another session to come on. I just want to take to the privilege of the Chair for one last moment to say this: It is my understanding that the interest of the International Press Institute is not in ownership of stock in the newspaper enterprises and is not

directly in the profit and loss in such enterprises. Our interest now and always is in the maintenance of an independent press wherever it exist, especially where its existence is threatened. Now we must proceed to the next -- all the persons here return to a discussion of the business of the Institute. I want to thank our panel members very much for coming today.

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