

EXCERPTS OF A PRESS CONFERENCE HELD BY THE
PRIME MINISTER, MR. LEE KUAN YEW, AT THE SINGAPORE
POLYTECHNIC, FOLLOWING NOMINATIONS FOR THE 1976
GENERAL ELECTIONS, ON 13 DECEMBER 1976

16 seats are not contested, the rest, by a multitude of parties. A common denominator of these parties is that they like to be elected into office, a creditable ambition. Another common denominator, which isn't as creditable, is that they don't seem to know what is it they want to get into Parliament for. Most of them want to give away everything -- lower taxes, lower rents, lower Public Utilities rates. Abolish National Service -- says Barisan Sosialis; or change it into a community service, says the Workers Party. Dismantle the Internal Security Act and release all detainees.

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We stand for the security of Singapore which unfortunately

demands that hard-core detainees who refuse to abjure the use of violence will have to be detained. If they will denounce the use of force to take office, or just to live peacefully -- even if they don't support a government, we are happy to save expenses in having to feed them and care for them.

We believe that National Service has built up a small, but in our circumstances, a credible defence capability.

We intend to fight on these issues. We don't believe that the public will go in for these give-aways, unfortunately none of these people who say they are going to give them away, have either, by the management of their own parties or their own personal fortunes, shown that they are able to accumulate anything. They can give it away, but they don't know how to make it. The PAP has built up over S\$8,000 million worth of foreign exchange. And I think if we start giving things away, we'll end up paupers -- a broken-back state, like so many who are now not only classified as the Third World but as the Fourth World. We intend to stay as we are. Moving up gradually, slowly, painfully through hard work, from the Third World -- reaching out to a transition stage into the top half of the Third World.

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QUESTION: Do you consider this coming election much easier compared to the last one?

PRIME MINISTER: My own assessment is that some of the grouses -- not all -- of the last elections which accounted for 30% protest votes, ought to be satisfied. We have taken some care to ensure that where resettlement has to take

place, people are fairly adequately compensated and the social ecology is not too abruptly upset. In other words, not only are they compensated, by and large, they are also able to make a livelihood under new conditions. It is always a problem when you knock down a block of old buildings. They are usually rent-controlled, extremely cheap. Then you put shopkeepers into a new building, the rents are prohibitive or they find them prohibitive, because they've got to compete against the supermarkets. So we have found a way whereby we either give them an alternative occupation, or if they still think they can be in grocery business, then they pay half the normal rent -- going up by 10% to the normal rent over a period of five years.

We will be careful not have too much disruption in the process of building or rebuilding the city.

QUESTION: You expect to win all the seats?

PRIME MINISTER: We fight to win. When we field a candidate, we field him seriously as a man who can look after his constituency and make an intelligent contribution to the national debate.

QUESTION: Would you yourself not personally tend to favour some kind of an opposition in Parliament?

PRIME MINISTER: The pity of it is, that nobody in the Opposition has got it in him to pose a rational alternative on how to make Singapore more viable, more secure, more prosperous, on how to give the people a better life. None of them has come up with any proposals for that. They haven't got either political sense or substance. They want to do what they think are the popular things, or what the Malayan Communist Party's followers believe are the popular things -- like the abolition of the Internal Security Act and no detention without trial, dismantling of National Service, reunification of Singapore and Peninsular Malaysia into Malaya under 'genuine' terms. I believe the people are entitled to something better.

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We've got to be our own monitors, our own conscience keepers. That has been our difficult job over the last 11 years since 1965 when the Barisan Sosialis, on instructions from higher-up, walked out of Parliament and decided to take the battle into the streets. Now, of course, they are left high and dry, because the people don't believe in them. The communists just write off another united front as worthless. But, of course, had we not been

active earlier this year -- Mr. Rajaratnam just hinted at it -- the communists would have been in a position to mount a new united front.

QUESTION: Prime Minister, why are you calling the election now, instead of nearer the end of your party mandate?

PRIME MINISTER: I have always believed in clearing the decks before I run into rough weather. The OPEC Ministers are meeting on the 15 of December and if we are lucky, we may have an increase that the world can live with. I hope it will be so, in which case all will be well. It may be that they will have the increase in two bites as has been reported from Qatar -- a small one for January and another one for June-July.

The second one is that the economic recovery of the industrial economies both in America and in Europe, with the exception of Germany and probably Holland, has not been as predicted. There is a great deal of talk about tax cuts in America when the new Carter administration takes over, with a budget deficit of something between US\$15 billion up to US\$30 billion. Maybe this can get the U.S. economy going, and at the same time, control inflation. I don't know. But I believe before running into rough weather, any sensible captain battens down his hatches.

I need hardly mention what may happen between the Arabs and the Israelis if there is no move towards a settlement in the Middle East. Things will happen in 1977 and not all of them may be favourable. So we have decided that we will forego the nine months that we are entitled to.

I might also add that the Japanese election results mean that one of our major trading partners and investors is in a state of flux for some time. Their economic recovery is also not likely to be as sustained as we have hoped it will be. All this is not helpful.

QUESTION: Do you expect that the protest votes in this election will be lower than the 30% in the last elections?

PRIME MINISTER: I would not be surprised, if it were lower than the last time. But, of course, the opposition must believe otherwise or they wouldn't be trying, would they? Mind you, less are trying this time than last time, which seems to me a pity because they have steered clear of the good seats. This means the percentage of protest votes from my point of view will not be complete and may not be accurate.

It's an irrational opposition. Dr. Lee Siew Choh decided to go back to Rochore because he thinks it is the same old Rochore of 1963. He doesn't know how the world has changed. The Workers' Party, I think, are rather simplistic in their approach. They just looked up the election results the last time and they worked out all those areas where they thought the margin was very small for the PAP. So they have chosen Kampong Chai Chee where in the last elections we won against the combined opposition by 600 votes. They have gone to Changi because they believe the margin the last time was not very big and perhaps with the building of the airport, the resettlement has disrupted people and made them unhappy. They are rather simple minded in their approach, because first, it is a very different Chai Chee from 1972. We made it very different. We developed it -- factories, new homes and a new town centre. I think they are going to get a surprise on the 23rd December. I am sorry if they won't be enjoying their Christmas. As for Changi, they are also in for a surprise because this time we made sure that a resettlement takes place not only with better compensation, but we have enabled them to be sited in places where they can make a living. The protest will not be the same. Furthermore, the whole of Changi knows, including Changi New Village, that we have put a lot of effort into regenerating life in Changi since the British pulled out in 1971 -- rebuilt the New Village, and putting up an airport which when the workers move from Paya Labar, will give it a great deal of business.

QUESTION: After the last election, you were thinking of allocating some seats to the university.

PRIME MINISTER: Well, the university dons unfortunately shied away from that. I was quite prepared to let them have two. One for Nanyang and one for University of Singapore. But somehow they felt a little shy. They thought the academic shouldn't be sullied by the rough and tumble of political debate in Parliament. And they would have had a rough and tumble because you can't expect to slosh ministers without being sloshed back. They didn't like the prospect. I am prepared to consider the proposal again. They may rotate their representatives until they can find some people who can take the rough and tumble.

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