

SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER,

MR LEE KUAN YEW, AT THE PAP 25TH ANNIVERSARY RALLY

HELD AT THE NATIONAL THEATRE ON 20 JAN 1980

HISTORY IS NOT MADE THE WAY IT IS WRITTEN

To understand the present and anticipate the future, one must know enough of the past, enough to have a sense of the history of a people. One must appreciate not merely what took place but more especially why it took place and in that particular way. This is true of individuals, as it is for nations. The personal experience of a person determines whether he likes or hates certain things, welcomes them or fears them when they recur. So it is with nations: it is the collective memory of a people, the composite learning from past events which led to successes or disasters that makes a people welcome or fear new events because they recognize parts in new events which have similarities with past experience. Young people learn best from personal experience. The lessons their elders have learned at great pain and expense can add to the knowledge of the young and help them to cope with problems and dangers they had not faced before; but such learning, at second hand, is never as vivid, as deep or as durable as that which was personally experienced.

Of those on this platform today, four were on the platform of the Victoria Memorial Hall on 21 Nov 1954: Toh Chin Chye, Rajaratnam, Devan Nair and I. I wrote that Goh Keng Swee and K. M. Byrne were present at the floor of the hall in the 25th Anniversary Souvenir. I asked my secretary to check. The reply from Goh Keng Swee was that he was away in London doing his Ph.D. Between these two points of time, I confess that I had no glimpse of the ups and downs of our fortunes, the excitement of our successes in 1959 and 1963, the dread of disaster in 1964's communal riots, the despair of endless communal bickering in 1965 which preceded and followed the formation of the Malaysian Solidarity Convention in May 1965, and the eventual triumph of our cause after the shocks of , first, separation in August 1965, and , next, the withdrawal of British Bases announced in 1968. The trends, however, were obvious and clear: British colonialism was on the way out, nationalism would triumph; and nationalism would then have to slog it out with communism for the hearts and minds of the people. To this day, what never ceased to astonish me was that I never anticipated the terrifying hate and irrational fears generated by blind prejudices over race, religion, and language.

This meeting symbolizes the passing of the generations. A group of men in their 30's founded this Party 25 years ago and embarked on a venture that changed the lives of two million. It was a venture intended to embrace the lives of about 10 million then in Singapore and Malaya. It turned out differently. Another younger group of men, in their 30's, present today will have to give new impetus to this venture; a fresh burst of enthusiasm and idealism can provide that thrust which can propel and help chart the course ahead under different and difficult conditions. Will events turn out exactly the way I envisage it at present? Of course not. We planned that there should be one united Malaya, comprising the peninsula and Singapore. It ended up with one Federation of Malaysia comprising Sarawak and North Borneo, but excluding Singapore. History does not happen in clean-cut units like courses for credits in an American university.

It is after forces let loose in tumultuous events have run their course that the historian comes along to mark out neat periods and narrates them in clear-cut chapters.

25 years ago, whilst none of us could have foreseen the results, we all knew, the four of us on that stage knew, deep down in our souls, that forces had been let loose that must run its full course. Trends which have persisted will go to their logical conclusions, with the intervention of the will of small groups of

men. The colonialists withdrew without a fight. They conceded power to nationalists and the nationalists in Singapore came very close to total rout and defeat as the communists mounted their attacks and generated such intense pressures that I have never felt since. Those hectic years of 1961 till 1963 when every day was a crisis, every morning was a barrage of blows, defections, riots, strikes, arson – vicious, venomous attacks: that's when you know who's got what it takes to be a leader.

We had to go through this roundabout course of merger with Malaysia or we would never have achieved independence on our own. First, the British would never have allowed it, Singapore was too valuable a strategic military base. Secondly, if the British had allowed it, we would not have made it. We would have collapsed in fractious strife if we had not first joined Malaysia and learned the sharp lessons of the politics of communal intimidation.

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Singaporeans – there were none really, then – the peoples of Singapore would have stayed mesmerized, trapped by Marxist slogans and Chinese chauvinist chants. They would never have come down to earth to face reality, or if they did, they would have been shocked by the sheer colossalness of the problem of becoming a nation on our own. But they tasted the bitterness of communal terror tactics – the veiled threats in the newspapers every day; riots in

the streets on two successive occasions in July and September 1964, when innocent people were butchered, many more maimed and crippled for no reason other than that they happened to be on the streets and happened to be either Chinese or Malay. And lest we forget, for prolonged periods of 14 months – from July 1964 to August 1965 – there was the nervousness and the tension. Every wild rumour of a racial or a religious clash caused panic as people left their offices, collected their children from the schools to bring them to the safety of their homes before the curfew came down. People learned to store up tinned food because they discovered that with curfews and riots the shops were shuttered and the markets were deserted. All this plus the bitterness at racial domination transformed people's attitudes. Hence we, as the government, were able to mobilize strong support; we checked reckless and stupid politicking aimed at the prejudices of different races, languages, religions and cultures. So after separation, we succeeded despite the overwhelming odds against us.

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A generation has grown up that is too young to remember all that. But the generation that does remember that will know that without going through that, we would not have made it. That resolve to cast aside our differences of race, language and religion and culture would not have been so deep and so abiding.

Perhaps in 10, 20 years' time, Ph.D. students will pick up my remark and build their treatises on this one climacteric which triggered off a Singaporean entity. It started with the riots in 1964 when the police were out of our control and the army was not at our disposition; when we realized how vulnerable we were. So we learned to be patient but to be firm on gut issues – issues involving race, language, religion, culture.

It is necessary to remind our young that when we started, in 1954 and when we formed the government in 1959, we did not have the basic elements to be a nation. The attributes of nationhood were missing: a common ethnic identity – we will never have ethnic homogeneity – but we did not even have a common ethnic identity; we saw ourselves as disparate Hokkiens, Cantonese, Hakkas, Teochews, Hainanese.

The Chinese Chamber of Commerce, up till recently, was structured along those lines. And the Malays were either Malays or Boyanese or Javanese or Minangkabau. They still have associations to bind people of the same ethnic origins.

We did not have a common language. We couldn't speak to each other. Nor did we have a common experience, a common sharing of historic events that creates a common culture.

We knew in 1959, as we know today, that it was wasteful to have our students in schools which were teaching them in English, in Chinese, in Malay and in Tamil; and they went to two universities being taught in English and in Mandarin. We knew that with the administration and commerce in English, the new factories and the banks employing and needing graduates in English, it was a terrible imposition to send 18-year olds to complete a three to four year university course in Mandarin at Nanyang University and then learn English in government departments, on-the-job, taking five to seven years before they were effective. But if we had been logical and decided to cut out this waste – a waste of human energy and talent – we would have let off violent emotions that would have shattered our fragile society. We had to wait till parents and students came to a realization on their own, as a result of their own experience, then only could we begin to move. In 1975 I first sent a Minister to Nanyang University to try and convert it from teaching in Chinese into teaching in English. That failed because he couldn't create an English-speaking atmosphere in a Chinese speaking campus. Then in 1978, we started a successful conversion in the Joint Campus.

The perils were great. Even in 1975, several of my Cabinet colleagues were not in favour of sending a Minister there with instructions to convert the instruction from Mandarin into English. Even in 1978, when I proposed that we move them into a Joint Campus, there were a number who had very strong reservations. I moved only because all the Nantah graduate MPs asked me to move; my own NU base in Parliament was prepared to back it. If they had told me that in 1975, three batches of graduates would have been saved. As it was, we waited till 1978. As it is, even in 1980, after 20 years of bilingual education, our efforts to get Chinese Singaporeans to give up dialects and to use Mandarin has aroused controversy. To my astonishment there has been more heat in the Chinese newspapers from readers who are mostly Mandarin-educated protesting at the Mandarin dubbing of Cantonese TV series.

Although I cannot forecast the results of our plans, I see two clear trends: first, levels of education and technical skills will rise. By 1990, this will lose us our developing country status. Two sectors – industry and services – will make a larger share of our GDP. It is an enormous pity we had not started earlier to train better teachers and to recruit more teachers, lecturers, and professors from overseas. Had we done so, our progress up the technological ladder will be much swifter. Nevertheless, in five to seven years, from pre-primary school up

to university and postgraduate research, standards will go up as more resources and teachers are deployed over a smaller student population. This will have an impressive impact on the economy as it helps us move away from simple to skill-intensive manufacture and from low to middle-level technology.

There is a second trend. The “old guard” will progressively – I choose the word “progressively” with a sardonic sense of the inevitable – step aside as the young takes charge. Several of my senior colleagues have urged me to replace them. They have done this too vehemently for me to treat these urgings as just a natural desire to be reassured of their indispensability. I have refused to let them go, at least not until I have new ministers of comparable capacity, with some on-the-job experience. It was unfortunate that none of us realized that this team was an unusual generation brought together by extraordinary events. For years, we believed that the orderly political processes would throw up men who can carry on our work. And it was only in the first half of the 1970s that we recognized this was not going to happen.

Of the first line leadership – all Ministers, Senior Minister, Ministers of State – there are 18, seven are Singaporeans, seven were born in Malaysia, four elsewhere. It has a profound significance which I did not realize in the 1950s.

Take the second line: Ong Teng Cheong, Goh Chok Tong, Ahmad Mattar, Dhanabalan, Tony Tan, Lim Chee Onn, all Singaporeans. Bernard Chen, non-Singaporean. Six out of seven.

When you throw the net for big fish, the bigger the pond, the bigger the fish. The net that brought in this generation was thrown in a big sea that stretched across Malaysia, to South China, to South India, to Ceylon, Jaffna to include S. Rajaratnam. Now we are throwing the net into a small pond. It's going to have less big fish. This is the answer to the puzzle which I hit upon in the middle first half of the 1970s. hence, this active drive to look for leaders because leadership is more than just ability. It is a combination of courage, determination, commitment, character and ability that makes people follow someone as a leader, and leaders must be activists.

Read the analysis of the MPs and project this into the 1990s. At present, 69 MPs – 44 are Singapore born; 15 Malaysia; 10 elsewhere.

In 1959, out of 43 MPs, only 21 were Singapore born, 15 Malaysia, seven elsewhere – less than half, 21 out of 43. In 1955, of three MPs, I was the only Singapore born. So from 33 per cent, the process of Singaporeanization has built to 64 per cent.

Now take a sharper look: MPs who are 40 and below at the date of election. The law assumes when an accident like an aeroplane crash occurs, that the older died before the younger, for purposes of succession. So we assume that the older MPs will die before the younger ones.

In 1959, 18 out of 34 were Singapore born or 53 per cent. In 1976, 26 out of 31 or 84 per cent. In 1980, 14 out of 15 are Singapore born or 93 per cent. We can only draw our ministers from the MPs. So if the the MPs become 93 per cent Singapore born, we shall have only Singapore-born ministers.

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Let me take the magnifying glass on to minister: there were nine ministers in 1959. When appointing ministers we were not conscious whether they were Singapore born or not. Only two Singaporeans out of seven. 1980, it is 8 out of 16.

Of course, there was the other side of the coin. All the activists had gravitated from Malaysia, down to Singapore, to create revolution. A breakdown of the eight detainees, whom we demanded should be released before we took office in June 1959: six born in Malaya (Lim Chin Siong, Woodhull, Fong Swee Suan, Chan Chiaw Thor, Devan Nair, James Puthucheary). Lim Chin Siong, of course, had become a Singaporean. He became an Assemblyman so we left his Singapore citizenship alone. Only two Singapore born: Chan Say Jame, Tan Chong Kim. The big trouble-makers were Malaysians. When we banished four trouble-makers, excluding Devan Nair and Lim Chin Siong, we began to have peace and stability; the Communist United Front was never the same again.

But we couldn't have one without the other. If we wanted Goh Keng Swee, Toh Chin Chye, Ong Pang Boon, Chua Sian Chin, Devan Nair, we had to have Fong Swee Suan, Lim Chin Siong, Woodhull, James Puthucheary.

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Now the realization that our catchment has become confined to Singaporeans makes it necessary that we systematically comb all the top echelons of all sectors in Singapore for potential leaders – every profession, every sector – commerce, manufacturing – trade unions, sports associations. We even fielded in Telok Blangah someone who appeared a leader in the football world for potential leadership. We were wrong.

Even so I cannot be sure that all the second-line leaders will make it when they fly solo. It's one thing no one can predict. Now they are flying with a co-pilot. But at the risk of being wrong. I believe most probably six out of seven will make it. And they will face a world situation that will change drastically. In fact, it has already changed drastically. The economies of America, Western Europe and Japan hover perilously between inflation and recession, precariously dependent on rocketing oil prices and uncertain supplies. The world, which détente was supposed to make more stable, has been rocked. America's allies in Western Europe appear reluctant to follow her lead by refusing to impose deterrents on the Soviet Union for its occupation of Afghanistan, and a different world balance is in the making.

Our most comfortable niche is with an ASEAN which keeps out of the contentions of the great powers whenever our vital interests are not directly involved. In Kampuchea, unfortunately, our vital interests are involved, on the side of an independent, neutral Kampuchea, neither hostile to Vietnam nor to Thailand.

Whilst the international outlook is grim, the regional outlook is fair, provided Thailand's sovereignty continues to be respected.

By the late 1980s, the second-line leadership, now in their 30s, should be able to take charge. They will have to see us through the imponderable surprises and crises of the next decade. They have great challenges to overcome. I believe they will find the people of Singapore stouthearted and robust, still hardworking and definitely better educated, and most important of all more united than they were in the 1950s and 60s. They will respond to sincere and firm leadership. The PAP can be proud that it has helped to bring this about.

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Table I

PLACE OF BIRTH OF PAP ASSEMBLYMEN/MEMBERS OF
PARLIAMENT RETURNED AT GENERAL ELECTIONS

Note: Percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding off.

General Election	Place of Birth						Total
	Singapore		Peninsular Malaysia		Elsewhere		
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.
1955	1	33%	2	67%	-	-	3
1959	21	49%	15	35%	7	16%	43
1963	23	62%	8	22%	6	16%	37
1968	33	57%	14	24%	11	19%	58
1972	36	55%	18	28%	11	17%	65
1976	43	62%	16	23%	10	14%	69
At Present	44	64%	15	22%	10	14%	69

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Table II

PLACE OF BIRTH OF PAP ASSEMBLYMEN/MEMBERS OF
PARLIAMENT WHO WERE 40 YEARS OF AGE OR BELOW WHEN
RETURNED AT THE GENERAL ELECTIONS

Note: Percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding off.

General Election	Place of Birth						Total
	Singapore		Peninsular Malaysia		Elsewhere		
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.
1955	1	100%	-	-	-	-	1
1959	18	53%	11	32%	5	15%	34
1963	18	72%	5	20%	2	8%	25
1968	21	62%	7	21%	6	18%	34
1972	21	60%	8	23%	6	17%	35
1976	26	84%	3	10%	2	6%	31
At Present	14	93%	-	-	1	7%	15

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Table III

PLACE OF BIRTH OF CABINET MINISTERS
(EXCLUDING MINISTERS OF STATE)

Note: Percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding off.

General Election	Place of Birth						Total
	Singapore		Peninsular Malaysia		Elsewhere		
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.
1959	2	22%	6	67%	1	11%	9
1963	4	44%	4	44%	1	11%	9
1968	5	45%	5	45%	1	9%	11
1972	6	46%	6	46%	1	8%	13
1976	5	45%	5	45%	1	9%	11
At Present	8	50%	5	31%	3	19%	16

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Table IV

PLACE OF BIRTH OF 1ST AND 2ND LINE LEADERSHIPS

Note: Percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding off.

	Place of Birth						Total
	Singapore		Peninsular Malaysia		Elsewhere		
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.
<u>1st Line Leadership</u>							
*Mr Lee Kuan Yew Dr Goh Keng Swee Dr Toh Chin Chye Mr S Rajaratnam Mr Ong Pang Boon *Mr Lim Kim San *Mr Jek Yeun Thong *Mr Othman bin Wok *Mr E W Barker Mr Chua Sian Chin Mr Hon Sui Sen Mr Howe Yoon Chong Mr Teh Cheang Wan Mr Lee Khoo Choy *Mr Rahim Ishak Mr Chai Chong Yii Haji Ya'acob bin Mohamed *Mr Sia Kah Hui	7	39%	7	39%	4	22%	18
<u>2nd Line Leadership</u>							
*Mr Ong Teng Cheong *Mr Goh Chok Tong *Dr Ahmad Mattar *Mr S Dhanabalan *Dr Tony Tan Keng Yam Mr Bernard Chen *Mr Lim Chee Onn	6	86%	-	-	1	14%	7

* Born in Singapore

Table V

PLACE OF BIRTH OF THOSE RELEASED FROM DETENTION
WHEN THE PAP TOOK OFFICE IN 1959

Note: Percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding off.

	Place of Birth						Total
	Singapore		Peninsular Malaysia		Elsewhere		
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.
Mr Lim Chin Siong							
Mr S Woodhull							
Mr Fong Swee Suan							
Mr Chan Chiaw Thor							
Mr C V Devan Nair	2	25%	5	62%	1	13%	8
Mr James Puthucheary							
*Mr Chan Say Jame							
*Mr Tan Chong Kim							

* Born in Singapore

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