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SINGAPORE GOVERNMENT PRESS STATEMENT

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SPEECH BY THE GOVERNOR, SIR ROBERT BLACK,
AT THE CONFERMENT OF THE FREEDOM OF THE
CITY AT CITY HALL AT 5.30 P.M. ON FRIDAY,
NOVEMBER 22, 1957.

You have conferred upon me today the greatest honour which it is within your power to confer, the Freedom of this great City of Singapore. I am deeply touched by your generosity in spirit and in deed in making me a Freeman of the Lion City of the East.

Little did I think, when I stepped off the train from Kuala Lumpur, more than 25 years ago, at Tank Road Station to assume duty in the office of the Secretary to the High Commissioner in the Fullerton Building, that, one day, I should stand on these steps, which lead up into this magnificent City Hall, to address the citizens of Singapore as a Freeman and, in consequence, one whom you have honoured by admitting to a real intimacy. Because my association with this City and, indeed, with the land of Malaya, goes back for more than a quarter of a century, and because in this land, in that time, I have had the good fortune to make many friends, this gesture on your part, Mr. President and City Councillors, is all the more deeply understood and appreciated by myself.

Over one hundred and fifty years ago, Raffles said that, "If no untimely fate awaits it, Singapore promises to become the emporium and pride of the East". That prophecy became a reality long ago and, today, we live in a City which, with its rural environs and numerous adjoining islands, contains a population of nearly one and a half million souls. Most of you have won, and must continue to win, your livelihood and prosperity in the commerce which **has** grown out of our great Port and out of the well-established entrepot of good repute, and it is my prayer that both the prosperity and the high repute will never diminish, and also that you will never allow to fall into decay from any sense of frustration or discouragement in the face of temporary misfortune the most important natural resource which the people of Singapore possess, namely, their skills, skills which have enabled them to build up this great centre of shipping and trade, the skills which they must now, to some extent, divert and adapt for the expansion of industry.

We hope that, after the general elections to be held in the latter part of next year, we shall see come into being the new State of Singapore; it will have a fully-elected Government which will be responsible to a voting public whose franchise in turn will be based on citizenship of Singapore. More immediately, elections are about to take place for the new City Council; these are based on a widened franchise, and those elected by the voters will in turn elect a Mayor from their number.

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There have been many changes since the year 1822, when Sir Stamford Raffles appointed a Committee to plan the Town of Singapore and to lay down rules for its development, for which Raffles wished to see planned a lay-out for the Town, the nature of the buildings to be constructed, and the provision of what he described as "draining, lighting, watching, cleaning and the like".

There have been many changes since 1848, when the Governor-General of India in Council established by legislative set a Municipal Fund, to provide for certain municipal services, and a Municipal Committee, representative of resident rate-payers, to ensure the performance of these services, and since the day, one hundred and one years ago, when, by the Straits Municipal Act, there was formed a body corporate of a Resident Councillor and one appointed and three elected Commissioners, together called the Municipal Commissioners. Throughout the years the burdens placed on the Commissioners increased greatly, and it is important to bear in mind that the remarkable developments which have taken place in the provision of roads, of drainage, of water-borne sewerage and of water supplies, of lighting and of cleansing services, were not achieved by the planning and dictation of officials. The part which the representatives of the rate-payers have played has provided an important dynamic impulse to the steady and well-planned progress carried out in the interests of the citizens of Singapore. The City has been well served by its representatives and by its official staff throughout the years.

The distinction of the grant of a Royal Charter from His late Majesty King George the Sixth, in 1951, marked a recognition of civic status which the people of Singapore had sought to achieve over the years and could rightly justify by pointing to their accomplishment so evident in this City today.

And so we approach the latest phase in the history of our City, in which it will have an elected Mayor and a more broadly-based franchise designed to give still greater opportunity to the people of Singapore to have a voice in the running of their own affairs. The enhanced responsibility that will devolve upon each individual both in this City and on this Island will, I hope, bring a realisation that his or her new influence and new power carry with them a heavy obligation; it will be the duty of all who have the vote, of all who regard Singapore as their home and hope that it will be the home of their children and their children's children, to honour and to seek its fulfilment. This obligation is implicit in the act of faith which has found its inspiration in the belief that the people of Singapore can themselves minister to the spiritual and material needs of all members of the community which constitutes Singapore.

You have honoured me by giving me the Freedom of this City. "City" and "Freedom" in this context have the same association. The City should comprise a community so disciplined and conscious of its aim that it can secure the freedom of all within its bounds so that they may share the richness of the City's life. We base our final judgment of any city on the quality of the life of its people, and, when we talk of freedom, we do not merely think of "freedom from what", we look into the future and think of "freedom for what". If we do not know what we want to do with our freedom, we shall find the mocking silence of a vacuum succeeded by the rush of shrieking winds of temper and turbulence. Freedom is the highest form of social co-operation. It calls for hard thinking, self-discipline and teamwork. The last thing we can accept in a free community is the absence of social discipline.

Singapore is a City of great achievements, but it is, inevitably, in these times as at all times, a City which has to face many problems, and these will constantly remind us that political machinery as such has little intrinsic value. We must judge that machinery by the quality of the men who play their part in operating it and by the extent to which they fulfil their elected stewardship on behalf of their fellow-citizens. We have to think of the City as "providing all that is necessary for the fullness of life" and to remember that there is no life of the City apart from the life of its citizens; otherwise, we lose the dignity and direction which come from a deliberate dedication to a high purpose. The walls of the City mean nothing. It is those who live within the walls who matter. It was in one of the world's busiest and wealthiest cities that the poet Wordsworth wrote:

"Earth has not anything to show more fair,
Dull would he be of mind who could pass by
A sight so touching in its majesty.
This city now doth like a garment wear
The beauty of the morning; silent, bare,
Ships, towers, domes, theatres and temples lie.."

Could not that too be written of our Singapore? It may be that poetry is not the stuff of politics, but both are of the essence of an integrated community. Singapore, with its new responsibilities, political and practical, needs all the more the balance of the vision without which the peoples perish.

The richer the quality of the life of freedom within our City, the more it is to be cherished and the more precious the cargo we must navigate safely through the troubled seas of endeavour. I have great faith in the fundamental common-sense and in the sense of realism of the people of this City, and, because of that, I have great confidence in its future and high hopes for those who live within its confines. It has been a matter of pride for me, not only to be Governor and Commander-in-Chief of Singapore, but also to have known that, within the greater political and geographical entity which Singapore represents, there has been this great City of Singapore, whose achievements and appearance are a matter of pride to us all and admiration from those who visit us, and a cause for satisfaction to those, the elected representatives of the citizens of Singapore and the officials whom the City has employed, at the fruits of their efforts. To those who will soon succeed in the responsibility for administration I offer my best wishes.

In conclusion, and in thanking you once more most sincerely for the honour which you have done me today in making me a Freedom, I should like to repeat the message composed by Lord Halifax and Sir Edwin Lutyens for the inscription on the Jaipur Column in New Delhi, and to adapt that inscription to the City of Singapore in this form:

"In thought faith
In word wisdom
In deed courage
In life service
So may Singapore be great."

NOVEMBER 22, 1957.

(Time issued 1730 hours).