

SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER AT THE  
DINNER GIVEN BY MEMBERS OF THE LEGAL  
PROFESSION IN HONOUR OF HIM BEING  
MADE AN HONORARY BENCHER OF LIN-  
COLN'S INN AT THE LAKE CLUB, KUALA  
LUMPUR ON 26TH JUNE, 1971

My Lord President, Members of the Legal Profession, Ladies and  
Gentlemen,

I am deeply honoured—and moved at the tribute which you,  
my Lord President, and which, through you, the Legal Fraternity  
have just paid me. I should like to thank all of you for coming  
along tonight to share with me the pleasure and the sense of honour  
I feel in being made a Bencher of Lincoln's Inn.

I could not wish to celebrate this in better company than amongst  
the friends and colleagues of my own profession—and amongst the  
friends of my youth. I shall always remember this evening with  
particular pride and pleasure. For I see here tonight many familiar  
faces of those who studied law with me at the Inns of Court.

Many years have passed since those far off happy days; many  
things have happened and on some of us have fallen unexpected  
destinies. We may not be as young and as vigorous as we were  
then. We have to admit the evidence of hair that is receding and  
waistlines that are increasing. However, I do not admit, my Lord  
President, despite your description of a Bencher, that there is a  
prima facie case for describing me as one of "the most ancient  
men" of Lincoln's Inn.

My Lord President, Ladies and Gentlemen,

The trials, not at the Bar but of politics, have been the stuff of  
my daily life in the last 20 years and, as a result, I cannot say  
that I have been able to deepen such knowledge and under-  
standing of the Law as I have acquired in my student days. It  
was, therefore, a very pleasant surprise to me that, without any  
further education in the Law, I should have been invited to sit  
at the Bench of my old Inn.

Politics is indeed a strange profession. It has enabled me  
without having to demonstrate any special knowledge of the law  
or to go through the usual processes of slowly gaining eminence

and distinction at the Bar, to rise from the unspectacular position of a non-practising Barrister to the elevated company of the Benchers of Lincoln's Inn.

I remember there was a rhyme that ran:

“The Inner for a rich man  
The Middle for a poor  
Lincoln's for a parchmener  
And Gray's Inn for the law”.

This was obviously written by a man from Gray's Inn and, therefore, biased. However, I found inspiration from my own Inn when I remembered that there was a window in Lincoln's known as the Prime Minister's window. Some of my predecessors from Lincoln's had found a fairly useful alternative to the Law—Robert Walpole, William Pitt the Younger, Disraeli, Gladstone and Asquith. So I decided to join politics.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

My Lord President has given us a fascinating glimpse into the traditions of the Inns of Court. All I can add to this is a little about the position of the Bencher. I find from the records of Lincoln's Inn that the original officers were as follows: Treasurer, Autumn Reader, Lent Reader, Dean of the Chapel, Keeper of the Black Book, Marshall, Pensioner, Butler for Christmas, Steward for Christmas, Master of the Revels, Chief Butler, Chaplain and Servants.

Now that I am a Bencher myself, I have to consider which of these offices I might like. I do not think I can become “Treasurer” because we already have Tun Tan Siew Sin. I cannot be “Master of the Revels” since there are many other candidates in this room better equipped for that particular post. I suppose I could become a “Pensioner” but, before that, I think the only useful job left for me is that of “Chief Butler”. Which is probably why I am President of the Lake Club. Lincoln's Inn, of course, if undoubtedly the most superior of all the law Inns of Court. After all, as the Lord President has been kind enough to remind us, we introduced champagne. And, in the Lake Club, ladies and gentlemen, we are trying to keep up this tradition. You are all cordially invited, whatever your Inn, to come along and eat your dinners there.

My Lord President, Ladies and Gentlemen,

If I may now be serious, I should like to comment on the fact that all of us of my generation were educated in the law at the Inns of Court in London. I should like to pay tribute to the training and preparation this gave us for the responsibilities we were to assume when we come back to this country. While browsing over my law books recently, I found in the closing sentence of Polluck and Maitland, something which seems to sum up the relationship between the legal education we received in England and the tasks confronting us in a country far away from England.

The sentence reads:

“Those few men who were gathered at Westminster round Pateshull and Raleigh and Brackton were penning writs that would run in the name of kingless Commonwealth on the other shores of the Atlantic Ocean. They were making right and wrong for us and our children”.

I like to think, my Lord President, and ladies and gentlemen, that not only our legal training but the sense of justice and equity that we all received at the Inns of Court have helped us to make right and wrong in this country for us and our children.

It has been said that there are two classes of people in the world: those who constantly divide the people of the world into two classes and those who do not.

However, when we think of the law in relation to society, it is more correct that we should think of a three-fold division: those who are makers of the law, those who are practitioners at the Bar and those who are interpreters of the Law from the Bench.

But, it is important in this context to remind ourselves that although there are these three different categories—in the Legislature, at the Bar and on the Bench—each performing its own functions, the objective which we all seek to serve is the same: that is, to strengthen carefully and conscientiously the legal edifice which is an essential foundation for the security, stability and progress of the Nation.

Tocqueville says somewhere that “savage laws inefficiently enforced are less effective than mild laws enforced by an efficient administration, regularly, automatically, as it were, everyday and

on all alike". To live up to this axiom is the joint responsibility of us all.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I should like if I may, to go a little further. In the more leisurely days of the past, lawyers tended to predominate in the Legislative Chambers throughout the world. It is less so now, though there are still certain legislatures where you can hardly throw a stone without injuring a couple of lawyers. Certainly, that is not the case in Malaysia and while I have no wish that lawyers should come to bodily harm, I think it is time that we reverse this tendency. Politics is too serious and dangerous a profession to be left entirely to the politicians. All of us here are, in a sense, a privileged group, privileged that is by the education we have received, most of us abroad.

Let us remember that those to whom much is given, much is expected. Of course, this remarks apply not only to lawyers but also, to all others of the educated elite in Malaysia, in all the profession and in all sectors of national life. And, of course also, I used the word "politics" here in a wider sense than party politics, I use it in the sense of service to the community.

My Lord President, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Needless for me to say, members of our profession have always played a crucial role in the affairs of our nation. They were prominent in the struggle for independence and they have been generously represented in country's leadership since Independence. It is with great confidence, therefore, that tonight I call on you to lend your support to the new challenges that we are now facing.

One of the major tasks confronting us, as you know, is to restructure our Malaysian society in the interest of social justice. This is a task in which the law has already played an important part. It was to the legal profession we turned when we had to reframe the Constitution to give us a new foundation for national unity on a lasting basis. And, it will be on the judiciary that we shall rely to uphold this Constitution—to implement it and to interpret it.

But, tonight, ladies and gentlemen, I am appealing to you to give us more than just your professional services. We in the profession dedicated to the Rule of Law, must help to make it prevail over those forces in our society destructive to peace and order.

All of us who live by the profession which seeks to command right conduct and forbid wrong-doing, must see to it that social justice will prevail. Perhaps, in this country more than any other, I do not need to point out to you the relationship between law and social justice. After all, we have the unique advantage of an Attorney-General who knows only too well his relationship with Social Welfare.

I hope, ladies and gentlemen, that in your practice of the law, you too will be able to go beyond the precedents and the rules, in order to uphold the principles of humanity, reason and justice, and see that we do not fail in equity towards our people.

Ladies and gentlemen, as I have always said on several previous occasions, the years ahead will prove to be the most crucial period for us, for our survival as a nation.

I urge, therefore, that no one stands on the side-lines, each tending to his own particular concern. Every one of us has a part to play in the nation's life bringing with us our special knowledge and aptitudes, infusing fresh vigour and new perspective so that the business of the nation does not fall into well-worn, sluggish and familiar grooves. The influx of fresh ideas and new energy and the wider participation on national concerns can only bring good to the service of the nation.

My Lord President, Ladies and Gentlemen, it is not my intention on this convivial occasion to speak at any length. After all, it hardly seems a fair recompense for this sumptuous meal which you have given me that I should inflict a long speech on you. But, I should like to leave that thought with you because it is well to remind ourselves of the familiar phrase that "you may not be interested in politics but the politics is always interested in you".

Finally, let me thank you once again for the honour you have done me this evening, for your generous hospitality and for your stimulating company.

May I now invite you all to join me in drinking a toast to the Bench and Bar.