

MULTIPLICITY OF UNIONS

"A MAJOR PROBLEM"

Tun Razak declared open the 15th Malaysian Trades Union Delegates' Conference on 10th December, 1965 in Kuala Lumpur. At the same time he laid the foundation stone of the new M.T.U.C. building. He expressed the hope that during the Conference they would be able to evolve guide-posts for their development.

This Conference is another milestone in the development and progress of your Congress and also of the trade union movement as a whole in the country. This Conference should be an important occasion for you to take stock of the activities of the Congress, to reflect on its activities over the past year and to assess its effectiveness in discharging its specific task as a central co-ordinating and advisory body for the trade union movement.

The trade union movement in Malaya today has not only established its own position and status within the economic and social structure of this country, but has also earned for itself international recognition and prestige. This, I can say, is due in no small measure to its leaders who believe in the concept that trade unions should be formed on the basis of independence, responsibility and the principle of democracy. Unfortunately, and notwithstanding the progress made, the movement still has a long way to go before it can be said that it speaks with one voice for the whole body of workers engaged in various trades and industries. The number of workers in the country remaining unorganised is still very large.

Multiplicity of unions and inter-union rivalry continue to pose a major problem. In a great number of cases, trade union membership and funds are limited and these appear to place severe limitations on the adequacy of the services provided by such trade unions to their members and their ability to undertake research and other activities. I am glad to learn that the leaders of the M.T.U.C. being fully conscious of this position, are endeavouring to advise other workers' groups for a more effective consolidation of the trade union movement generally. The Government, on its part, will continue its policy of giving every encouragement to the development of a sound, strong, responsible and independent trade union movement in the country.

A strong trade union movement is not, in itself, an adequate manifestation of our social structure. A sound industrial relations policy is very necessary so that workers and employers may be able to pull their weight in full in the tasks of economic and social development of the country. In so-called under-developed and developing countries, capital resources and technological skill are generally severely limited and our country is no exception. We must, therefore, welcome outside capital for our various development projects and industrial diversification with which we hope to provide more employment opportunities for our country's rapidly expanding population. To achieve this objective, the right labour climate must be created and maintained. I am glad to note that labour generally has played its part in the process of maintaining such a climate.

The Alliance Government fully realises that the rights of industrial workers must be fully protected as development takes place and their protection should be left in the hands of responsible trade unions. However, trade unions do not represent everyone in the country and the Government, representing the whole country, has a responsibility not only to the workers, but also to those who have no work and to the whole of our people. The Government's responsibility to those who have no work is to increase our industrial output and productivity and create a climate for greater investment so that there will be more jobs for the people. Therefore, while the Government recognises the need for a responsible trade union movement, the Government must also look to the interests of the rest of the people of the country, in particular to the large number of less fortunate people who may not have work. That is why it is most desirable to have sound industrial relations between employers and workers to ensure there will be more development, more trade in the country and more employment. I do hope that it is one of the aims of trade unionism to increase development and trade. The nation's welfare depends on increased productivity, an expanding economy and on hard work. I do hope that it will be possible for trade unions to concern themselves also with training programmes, with apprenticeship programmes, workers' discipline and productivity. Indeed, I hope it will be possible for responsible trade unions to go further than this and take an active role in organising co-operatives, generating savings for development, promoting co-operative housing development, and generally making workers aware of their contribution to the development of the nation.

I am sure that if our trade union movement can put forward, from time to time, constructive suggestions for higher production and faster development, then, when the time comes to bargain with the Government or employers for better wages, the unions will be in a very much stronger bargaining position and will have the support not only of the Government but of the nation as a whole.

Perhaps, therefore, in laying the foundation stone of this building today, we can also lay the foundation stone of a Malaysian Trade Union movement truly Malaysian in spirit, dedicated not only to the welfare of the workers, but also to the development of our country as the future prosperity of our workers is dependent on the development of Malaysia.

I feel it is important that while endeavouring to obtain increased benefits and better standard of living for your members, you should realise the need for a sound attitude towards the problems of production and development, and try to acquire a better understanding on broader aspects of industry and its development in the country.

Today the Government has just published its First Malaysia Plan. This Plan is a bold and imaginative blue-print for the future economic and social development of our country despite the continuous threat to our territorial integrity and independence. I would ask all of you, members of the trade unions, who undoubtedly have a great part to play in the implementation of this Plan, to give your utmost co-operation, as this Plan will not only provide greater employment opportunities, but also greater benefits to our people, particularly the have-nots and the workers.

One of the most essential features of an organisation is its ability to adapt itself to changing circumstances. Organisations have been known to disappear because they were too rigid in structure or too doctrinaire in outlook. Trade unions are not a mere collection of organisations but a movement, not a piece of machinery whose processes are unchanging, but a body of voluntary associations which must adapt themselves to new situations and be ready to grapple with changing problems. I have no reason to doubt that our trade unions will show themselves capable of adjusting their thinking and methods of action to the needs of the economic development and progress of the country. That you have a part to play is not disputed. How you play that part is

vital and I see. particularly in our present time, no alternative approach but one of mutual trust, co-operation and support.

The system of industrial relations in this country has all along developed on the basis of voluntary' arrangements between the parties themselves with a minimum of Government intervention. A lot of people now appear to be taking a critical look at this system, not because of any inherent weakness in the system itself, but because there has been a radical transformation of the environment in which the system functions. Economic conditions, social changes, the character and attitude of the main participants and. most of all. the economic and political needs of the country have undergone considerable changes.

Public expectation of rapid development, stability and proper conduct have been more and more keenly felt. When the Government acted in May this year to promulgate the two Essential Regulations, these considerations were foremost in our minds. The amended Regulations which came into effect on 23rd September are in many ways an important step and an experimental phase in the evolution of and the readjustment of the system of industrial relations to meet the demands and circumstances in this country. They provide, for the first time, for the Government to take a more direct and active role in the field of industrial relations. The Government is watching closely the working of these Regulations and seriously studying the adequacy of our system of industrial relations to see what new features can be adopted to bring it more in line with the needs of our national development and the realities of the labour situation in the country today.

Unemployment is not necessarily confined only to one particular field of activity but. in an era of industrialisation, it is incumbent upon all of us. whether in Government or in industry or amongst the workers groups to identify ourselves with the need of industrialisation and provide the services so required by industry. Government is. therefore, contemplating action through the Ministry of labour to establish a Department of Employment and Training which will cover fields such as all forms of industrial training, placement services on the completion of training and labour market research and information. To cater for the needs of this Department and also to be in a better position to analyse this statistical data that need to be compiled if we are to understand more accurately the labour market problem, the Statistical Division within the Ministry of Labour is also being expanded.

In the field of social security, you are aware that, in the Ministry of Labour, we presently have an experienced officer, very kindly seconded to us by the Government of India. This officer has embarked on a very close examination of a Pension Scheme on account of invalidity and its interrelated aspects. His services may be required in other fields of social security and the rate of his progress in the Invalidity Pension Scheme would determine the extent of his participation in these other fields.

I need only, in conclusion, to give you an assurance that this Government would continue to do everything possible to advance the living conditions of all the workers in the country. There are pieces of legislation presently under examination and, I agree, under examination for some time but, these things do take time and there are always different points of view which need to be reconciled. Legislations which are outstanding and which are under immediate review are those concerning the Extension of Collective Agreements, those affecting the safety, health and welfare of workers in factories, the conditions of employment of children and young persons and the improvement and control of housing provided to workers.

Here in Malaya we are endeavouring to create a new society in which every citizen will have a place in the Malayan sun. As you know, the development of our country has been lopsided. The western seaboard, because of its close proximity to the trade route of the Straits of Malacca, has been developed to the exclusion of other parts of the country during the last hundred years. The Alliance Government has set itself the task of opening up the hinterland for development and settlement so that new towns and villages can be established around new centres of production.

— *Tun Razak at the Rotary Governor's Banquet
in Kuala Lumpur in November, 1950,*