

TR: 2:12:64

SPEECH BY THE DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER AT THE
OPENING OF THE FOURTEENTH ANNUAL DELEGATES
CONFERENCE IN THE PLANTATION HOUSE,
PETALING JAYA ON 11TH DECEMBER, 1964

Mr. Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I should like to thank you very much for your kind invitation to be here with you today and to declare your Conference open. It is a great pleasure for me personally to meet so many prominent trade union leaders who have come from various parts of the country to attend this Conference. I hope I shall have many other opportunities, such as this, to get acquainted with trade union leaders and to understand your problems and aspirations of the workers of this country.

This is an important Conference in which you will review the activities and achievements of the Malaysian Trades Union Congress over the last year and discuss, consider and determine in the light of experience your plans and activities for 1965. I hope whatever you determine and plan you will always be as you have always shown in the past a great friend and supporter of the Government.

The Trade Union movement in Malaya has established for itself a high reputation of responsibility — responsibility and a sensible and balanced approach towards industrial relations and industrial progress.

With capable, dedicated and sincere leadership and the Malaysian Trades Union Congress in its various fields of activity both in Malaysia and in international field has won for itself respect and prestige. I should like to take this opportunity to express the Government's appreciation of the M.T.U.C. for the cooperation given to Government in general, for the contribution as well as constructive criticism made by its representatives sitting on various Government and public bodies and for its continued support and efforts to help raise the standard of living of workers in Malaysia. Our workers today enjoy better standard of living and better working conditions than most of their Asian counterparts. The Alliance Government would like to see the standard of living and working conditions of the workers improve still further from time to time. We want workers and everyone else to prosper and be happy in our country. I am sure that your plans for the future will be such as to continue with, and even strengthen, this sensible and balanced line of action which has been a strong point of all your activities in the past.

We are a new emerging nation, coming into a troubled and very competitive world, and it is really heartening for me and for my colleagues in the Cabinet to hear of your strong and undivided loyalty and support for the Government in its present crisis of confrontation and the threat of Indonesian aggression which is a threat to our national sovereignty and independence. If confrontation continues it necessitates us spending more of our national income on military and security measures. This means that less funds will be available for the implementation of our national development expenditure. Our priorities will still be on defence and national development for, we believe, those two must go side by side in order to triumph over Indonesian aggression.

The Alliance Government is determined that, in spite of confrontation and in spite of what Soekarno and his colleagues may say or do, to do everything in our power and our ability to ensure that our national development programmes go as planned.

There has, however, been a tendency to think of national development entirely in terms of Government spending, in terms of making available funds for development projects, and, in some ways, this thinking is partly wrong because the real key to the development of any country lies not so much in the assessment of dollars and cents but is in fact measured by the productivity of its people. If, as I have already said, we are going to go on towards progressive development in spite of confrontation — and I have no doubt whatever that we can do this, the main condition for our future success will be increased productivity in all fields of development, industrially, agriculturally and economically.

This is where the M.T.U.C, with its policy of declared loyalty to our nation, can play a most vital and important part by ensuring that in all your deliberations, your thinking and your planning not only should you determine to improve the conditions of our workers, and fight for their benefits, but also to continually remember that increased benefits and a better standard of living for our workers must come hand in hand with the national aim for increased productivity in all fields.

There has been a tendency in other countries for trade unions to be entirely what I would call "inward looking" or "inward thinking" — a mere machinery to fight for better conditions and better benefits for workers, without thinking of the consequences, of strike action and industrial disputes on the overall economic status of the nation. I feel that in order to maintain a balanced attitude throughout all trade unions in our country, in order to maintain a balanced approach, where trade unions and their entire membership can understand where they fit into the national aim or progress, it would be a good thing if, as a sub-

sidary to all your other activities, an attempt was made to continually inform your members at all level, the elementary economics of the structure of our country so that they become more and more aware of their own particular part, which they play, whether they be tapping rubber, whether they be working in the factory or at some office desk, is a vital contribution to the nation; they must remember that the sum total of the progress of our nation, is not just the efforts of leadership or the efforts of Government, but it is assessed by the complete contribution of each and every one of us towards higher production, higher standard and higher output.

I am aware that the M.T.U.C. has spent tremendous amount of time and efforts in 1964 in trying to resolve in a constructive manner many problems which arise in a developing and expanding nation such as ours. Through good guidance and leadership the M.T.U.C. has been able to obtain wage increases and improved working conditions for its members and affiliated unions. But I am sure that with capable, sincere and dedicated leadership, combined with a sane and sensible approach to these problems, towards trade unionism and Government, the M.T.U.C. will even do better in the future for the workers and the people of this country.

Industrial peace is very important in any country and especially at such times such as we are facing now. There can be no progress, no unity of action unless peace, industrial or otherwise prevails. It is very important that during this national crisis peace in all fields is maintained and strengthened so that no time and energy is wasted or efforts hampered in order to fight against Indonesian aggression and confrontation. We would like to see other interest, especially sectional and communal, to be completely subordinated to the national interest. Our aim now is to win over Indonesian confrontation and secure for ourselves due place in the affairs of Afro-Asian nations.

I have just returned from a trip to North Africa and the U.A.R. and I have had talks with President Nasser, President Ben Bella, King Hassan of Morocco, Mr. Habib Bourguiba Jr. of Tunisia and other top leaders of Afro-Arab nations and I am very glad that all these people showed understanding of the situation in Southeast Asia especially in our trouble with Indonesia. All of them expressed their great concern. To these leaders I explained about Indonesian aggression and it is most tragic that Soekarno despite what he has heard, and of course, reported back by his ambassadors in these countries should still be blind to the Afro-Asian opinion, which I found, was just the opposite of what Soekarno would have liked his people to believe regarding the birth and existence of our nation. President Nasser, President Ben Bella, King

Hassan of Morocco, Mr. Habib Bourguiba Jr. and other African leaders have accorded the recognition we deserve that we are an independent, sovereign nation which rightly should enjoy the respect of its neighbours. I am very grateful to these leaders, particularly President Nasser, President Ben Bella, King Hassan of Morocco and Mr. Habib Bourguiba Jr. for their understanding of our problems and their concern over the situation in Southeast Asia, brought about by Soekarno's aggression against Malaysia. Come what may, Soekarno cannot bully us out of our existence. Indonesia's defiance of the United Nations Security Council resolution, his belligerence and continued aggression against us and Indonesia's attack on U Thant,¹ U.A.R. are taking Indonesia away from enlightened Afro-Asian Nations.

I myself, as you know, had intended to visit all the African countries but since time had not been available, since I had to come back for the Budget Meeting, it had not been possible for me to visit more than the four countries I have mentioned. However, it is the intention of Government to send goodwill missions to the other African countries. It is our policy to get to know more about the newly independent nations of Africa and Asia, to maintain close and friendly relations with them. Government therefore proposes to establish diplomatic missions in some of the African countries. Of course, it would not be possible for us to establish missions in all the countries but we hope with the few missions that we shall establish it would be possible to cover most of the newly independent African countries. I also hope that it would be possible for us to invite leaders, political and others in other fields as well as journalists from these countries to come and visit our country so that they will be able to find out for themselves that we as a newly independent nation have no other wish but to live in peace, to give our people a new deal, a better and higher standard of living which have been denied them under the colonial rule.

It has always been our policy to support peace, international understanding and cooperation. Since we have achieved independence in 1957 this has been the line of policy followed by the Alliance Government. We realise that as an emergent nation it is our duty to devote our energy and time to the cause of peace and to devote our resources and wealth to the economic development of our nation, giving our people amenities of life and a higher and better standard of living which they had so much desired before independence.

The Alliance Government's policy is to give the Malaysian people a "new deal" or, if you like, a "new frontier" so that they can lead a

¹ Secretary General of United Nations.

decent life in a modern society and we can do these things under peaceful conditions. Therefore it is indeed sad that we have, as a result of Indonesian aggression against our territory, to divert part of our national resources to defence and security. This was not brought upon us by our own doing but has been forced on us by Soekarno's hostility. We are determined, however, to defend our independence and sovereignty, if need be, to the last drop of our blood.

Our keynote for future economic progress in the country is "peace and harmony in industry", because we cannot have economic progress in the absence of peace.

The Alliance Government believes, in and will always continue to implement its policy of encouraging the growth and development of free, responsible and democratic trade unions. I am particularly happy to note that the voluntary system of industrial relations which the Government has adopted, and which is based on the recognition of the desire of both employers and workers, to discuss and settle among themselves, matters or problems affecting them — a system which is already beginning to bear fruit. In some countries trade unions are mere political organs of the regimes and at times they become tough boys to be used for ransacking foreign embassies and libraries. But in Malaysia such things will never happen because we believe trade unions should be responsible, free, democratic and non-political. Under this system it is important that both sides of the industry should be adequately and effectively organised. Now I understand more and more workers have joined established unions which can cater for their needs, or set up for themselves appropriate organisations of their own, to regulate their collective relationships in a more effective and equitable manner. I am very glad also to know that the Industrial Court is being used more often now to settle disputes and differences. I sincerely hope that this increasing tendency to refer disputes, as and when the need arises, to the Industrial Court for settlement, will continue, as under the voluntary system of industrial relations the constitutionally and normally accepted methods of resolving disputes are first by negotiation, next by conciliation and finally, by voluntary arbitration.

I urge all unions and employers in the country, in all sectors of industry, to adopt, observe and apply "The Code of Conduct" for industrial peace which your Congress has evolved. I understand that my colleague, the Minister of Labour, with the cooperation of representatives of your Congress, and representatives of employers' organisations, continues to look into the question and matters in which employers and workers have a common interest, with a view to taking necessary measures for the welfare of the workers, and for the progress and well-being of industry as a whole.

The Alliance Government always has the interest of all people in this country at heart especially the have-nots. To say that the Alliance Government is capitalistic is not being very objective and certainly not true. As you know the membership of the Alliance is not the monopoly of the rich people. If it were true that the Alliance represents only big Business and Capitalists and is full of millionaires we certainly would not have won three general elections in succession. The truth is we are a pragmatic, nationalist party. The people of this country, I am very glad, realise that the Alliance Government is a Government dedicated to working for the interests of everybody and the best guardian of democracy and national sovereignty. The Alliance and I personally believe in the levelling up of the have-nots and the under-privileged so that they will have a level of income and decent standard of living in a civilised society. The Alliance Government was given a fresh mandate to rule Malaya for another five years early this year and the people did this because they are confident that the Alliance Government exists for their benefit and ultimate good of Malaysia. The people know that we have brought good results to them and they appreciate it. All this goes to show that the Alliance efforts of advancing progressively is a right policy and I am very glad that the M.T.U.C, like the Alliance Government, is also being directed by responsible people and in the right direction. With this belief and confidence I am sure the day is not too far away when trade unions in Malaysia will stand out as an example to the world of reasonability — responsible action, sane and sensible leadership.

I am glad to say that action has already been taken for the drafting of an "Extension of Collective Agreements Bill", the purpose of which is to make alternative collective agreements entered into between trade unions and employers in their respective industries, applicable to those employers and workers in similar industries which are not parties to the^{ff} agreement.

I hope it will not be long before this Bill is brought to Parliament and made law.

I am extremely glad to note that decision has been made to change the name of your Congress to be called "The Malaysian Trades Union Congress". With this change your organisation will be able to extend its guidance and assistance to workers in the other territories of Malaysia, and I wish you the greatest success in this new development of your activities.

As all of us know Malaysia, our new Nation, was born of the free wishes of our people themselves. We have shown to Soekarno and the world that we are a free and united people, determined to progress and determined to defend our sovereignty in spite of anyone who may have contrary aims to crush us. Not only must we defend and protect our boundaries and our shores but we must also be vigilant from within to ensure that nowhere do we allow the poison of subversion to undermine the strong structure of our new nationhood.

We have now, through the country, a very effective and loyal Vigilante Corps which have already proved their worth in their alertness by frustrating the designs of Soekarno, and his guerillas when they landed in Pontian, Labis, Sungai Kesang and Kota Tinggi. But it is not sufficient for us merely to watch the skies and watch our shores against the threat of outside aggression.

We must forever be vigilant in watching all associations and other organisations, through the whole country, for the poison of subversion and, when discovered, eradicate it with speed and determination. I am very happy and satisfied with the patriotism displayed by the workers of this country during this national crisis. I know the workers of this country for their patriotism and contribution in the defence of Malaysia.

I now say again, Mr. Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen, that it has been a great pleasure for me today to come and meet you here and I do hope that your conference will be both successful and fruitful.