

SPEECH BY THE DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER, AT THE
OPENING OF THE FIFTEENTH ANNUAL DELEGATES
CONFERENCE OF THE MALAYSIAN TRADES UNION
CONGRESS AT THE SELANGOR GIRL GUIDES
ASSOCIATION HALL, BRICKFIELDS, KUALA LUMPUR
ON 10TH DECEMBER, 1965

Mr. Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am happy to be here this morning to declare open your Fifteenth Annual Delegates Conference. The same honour was accorded to me last year when I was invited to open your Fourteenth Annual Delegates Conference. I would like to thank you very much for this invitation particularly because this gives me an opportunity again to meet so many leading trade unionists who represent different vocations and who have come from various parts of the country to attend this Conference.

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 coordinating and advisory body for the trade union movement as a whole. I am sure that during the deliberations at this Conference you would be able, to evolve guide posts for your future development.

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 strength, 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 much trade unions to their members and

their ability to undertake research and other activities. I am glad to learn that the leaders of the MTUC, 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.

One of most searching tests of an organisation or institution 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, cooperation 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 re-adjustment 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.

I realise that you have a heavy programme ahead of you and I should, therefore, hesitate to take up any more of your time, but, no doubt, amongst other matters, you would like to know what Government contemplates doing in the field of industrial training. I am aware that the situation is not quite satisfactory at this moment and, that there are more and more of our young men and women as well as those of other age groups, who are not employed or who are under-employed, because of their inability to supply the technical skill that is required by present day industry. Unemployment is not necessarily confined only to this 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 a very 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 inter-related 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 would like to add finally a brief comment in connection with labour problems in the States in Eastern Malaysia. Labour is an important to the Malaysian Government, whether it is in the States of Malaya or in the States of Sabah and Sarawak. We are, however, mindful of the provisions of the Inter-Governmental Committee Report in this respect but I am happy to say that there is general acceptance that the Central Government shall be responsible for labour matters within the geographical limits of these two States and there is already a considerable degree of integration of the Departments of Labour in Sabah and Sarawak with the Ministry of Labour here in Kuala Lumpur. This integration shall be continued and we hope that in the near future the working population in these two States of Eastern Malaysia and those in the State of Malaya would be able to come together as one integrated whole, working for the same cause.

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.