

SPEECH BY THE DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER AT THE NINETH ANNUAL DELEGATE CONFERENCE OF THE INDUSTRIAL AND MANUAL GROUP SERVICE STAFF COUNCIL, STATES OF MALAYA AT PLANTATION HOUSE, PETALING JAYA, ON 19TH DECEMBER, 1964

Mr. President, Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Tunku who was supposed to declared upon your Nineth Annual Delegates Conference this morning has asked me to convey to you his profound regrets for not being able to be with you today. He wants me to convey his best wishes to you and hopes your Conference will be successful.

I am particularly happy to have this opportunity to meet you all, because I had not been able to do so in the past. Nevertheless I never fail to follow the progress of your Council, and I am glad to note that it has achieved a considerable success.

As you all know, Government has always recognised the importance of consultation with the Staff Side in the matter of remuneration and conditions of service of the employees. It is in the interest of public service and goodstaff relation that there should be such consultation. For this reason it is the intention of Government that our present consultative machinery, the Whitley Councils, should not only be preserved but also nurtured.

I am aware our Whitley machinery is not free from shortcomings and defects and I know that the Staff Side has often expressed concern over these shortcomings. However, I am sure you all appreciate that the existing shortcomings of the Whitley Council are not to be unexpected because, like many other institutions, Whitleyism is a relatively new practice to us. And therefore, only through experience and conscious efforts, that we can hope eradicate these shortcomings thereby improving the efficiency of the Whitley machinery. I can assure you that the Government is doing its utmost to overcome these shortcomings so that Whitley Council can become a really effective consultative body.

I do realise that the Staff Side, too, is doing more than its share to make the Whitley Council a success. This is apparent from the responsible attitude adopted by the Staff Side in any negotiation and con-

sultations, and from the patience and understanding which the Staff Side has truly demonstrated in several major issues. The Staff Side has always tried to get matters settled amicably through intelligent discussion rather than resort to some other harsher course of action. This is indeed a true manifestation of the spirit of Whitleyism and I am most happy to say that Government has always appreciated these qualities, so true to the spirit of consultation.

It has been always the policy of the Alliance Government to encourage a strong and healthy trade union movement. This is because not only trade unionism is a form of freedom of association, which is one of the great hallmarks of a democratic society, but also because Trade Unions have responsibilities and important role to play in the progress of a country. But it should be remembered that the whole primary object is to improve the standard of living and the working conditions of the workers. A trade union organisation therefore should be free from any political tendencies or affiliations. It is a well-known fact anywhere that political parties like to make use of trade union organisations for their own political ends. The mark of a responsible trade union organisation, true to its fundamental cause, is therefore one which is able fend such political instruction. In this connection I am glad that your Council has amply shown that it has lived up to the name of a true trade union organisation.

I can assure you that Government has always the interest of its employees at heart and it is always prepared to consider any claim made to improve the terms and conditions of service of the employees provided, of course, they are reasonable and timely.

But it should also be remembered that the terms and conditions of service of Government officers are a part of the overall responsibilities of Government towards the people of the country. There must be a greater awareness of the challenge facing the people and our new nation particularly the challenge arising out of the rural and industrial development programmes of the Government and Indonesian aggression against our country. Government officers should work towards the greater objectives of Government for prosperity for all and maintaining and defending the sovereignty and independence of our nation against outside threat. The essential basis for such prosperity and independence is a stable public administration and a united people, in which you have an important part to play.

Our country now is facing aggression from our militant neighbour. There were four Indonesian incursions during this month. The challenge which everyone of us has to face now is far greater in scope and strain. We have now to defend our country from Indonesian aggressors. This is

indeed a heavy task for all of us, I am most touched by the declaration made by your Council some time ago and reiterated today by your President that members of the Industrial and Manual Group are solidly behind Government and are prepared to lay down their lives to defend our country. With such support I am confident that we shall successfully defend our country and preserve the freedom which we so much cherish.

Soekarno cannot bully is out of our existence. History — both ancient and recent — has shown that any country or person who uses force to impose his will on others will ultimately end in himself or itself being crushed or dominated or both. No force in this world can dominate or conquer a people who are determined to live as a free and independent people. Oppression cannot match freedom and love. Soekarno will suffer this same fate if he persists in crushing us.

We are convinced our course is right and just. Many countries in the world and I am particularly happy to note that an increasing number of Afro-Asian countries now know our position and many of them have come out openly in support of us against Indonesian aggression. This increased awareness was demonstrated during the United Nation Security Council debate over our complaint against Indonesian aggression and also during my recent visit to North Africa. I would like to take this opportunity of thanking all those friendly countries for the sympathy and understanding they have shown to our country.

At a time of national crisis, it is essential that everybody in this country should display a sense of responsibility when considering questions of national importance. It was, therefore, unfortunate that the Governments tax proposals for the coming year which were presented to Parliament last month should have, in public discussion, engendered more heat than light in certain sections of the trade union movement. In this connection, I would like to comment the example of the M.T.U.C. whose representatives, at a recent meeting with the Minister of Finance, agreed that the new taxes formed part of the proposals, should be given a fair trial provided the interests of labour are safeguarded.

No Government worthy of the name can abrogate its responsibilities to the nation. One of them is the paramount need to maintain our financial and economic stability and these revenue proposals were designate towards that end, in view of the substantial budgetary deficits which the Government will face in 1965 and in succeeding years. There is, therefore, no question of the new taxes being withdrawn, as advocated by certain sections of the business community. Whatever happens, they must be given a reasonable period of trial. Only then would it be possible

to judge whether some of the misgivings which have been expressed by their critics are well founded or not. It is even rumoured that those who are dissatisfied with these proposals intend to organise a one day "hartal" to express their dissatisfaction. This would be grave mistake and I need hardly add that the Government would take a serious view if this mischievous suggestion is actually implemented. The Government cannot submit to this form of intimidation for this is what such action would clearly amount to. I would, therefore, ask those who might seriously contemplate resorting to this form of action to pause before they carry it out.

I am happy to note from your Annual-Report that the Staff Side has asked for the General Orders, the Financial General Orders and the Manual of Office Procedure to be translated into Bahasa Kebangsaan. This is indeed a happy indication of the sentiment of your Council over the question of the national language. It is not difficult to learn the Bahasa Kebangsaan provided you have the interest and the will to do so. The Alliance Government has pledged itself to encourage and popularize the National Language in order that it will become the sole official language. I am glad to note that many State Governments have declared and some have even started using Malay the sole official language. I hope many more States will follow suit.

There is one important issue which I would like to mention here because it is of interest to all Government officers particularly to the members of the Industrial and Manual Group. I refer to the question of home-ownership. As you know, this question has been the subject of consideration for quite a long time now. I assure you that Government is attaching a great deal of importance to the question of assisting its officers to have houses of their own. It is the intention of the Alliance Government to create "properly owning democracy" not only among the Government officers but for all citizens of this country. But you must appreciate that this problem is by no means a simple one. For this reason, Government is attempting to formulate a new housing proposal designed to benefit all Government officers and workers. At this stage I can only say that a great deal of progress has been achieved in this direction and it is hope that Government would be able to finalise this issue in the near future.

I must remind you, by and large, Government officers and workers in this country are better treated, better served and enjoy greater affluence than their counterparts in Southeast Asia. I know you will noticed the affluence that is widespread in the country even in your own personal daily life and in your surroundings.

As leaders of your trade union organisations you have a heavy responsibility upon your shoulders. Your immediate duties are, of course, to your members to see that they obtain better working conditions. But do not forget that you have equally important duties towards our country. As I have already said earlier your organisations have an important role to play in achieving peace and prosperity of the country. One of the ways in which you have substantial contribution in this direction is to try to have industrial peace. This particularly important at the present state of our country. I hope therefore that in your deliberations you do not lose sight of your duties to your country.

I have happy news to tell you. As you know, the fasting month is coming very soon. In the past two years officers in Divisions I—IV had an advantage over the I.M.G. employees in that the former have been allowed to work shorter hour. This concession has now been extended to the I.M.G. employees and from next year you too will enjoy shorter working hours during the fasting month.

I now have great pleasure in declaring this Conference open.