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THE BATTLE FOR MERGER



by LEE KUAN YEW
Prime Minister of Singapore



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Prime Minister of Singapore



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*The Prime Minister, Mr. Lee Kuan Yew, at the microphone at
Radio Singapore.*

BATTLE FOR MERGER

A series of twelve talks broadcast by the Prime Minister of Singapore, Mr. Lee Kuan Yew, over Radio Singapore between September 13, 1961 and October 9, 1961.

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INTRODUCTION

THESE TWELVE talks were written to clarify and explain the political situation in Singapore and the Federation. The immediate aim was to prevent people from being confused by the Communists, their front organisations and front men. All should be able to see where the truth lies, and what the future has in store for us.

But as this is the first time the united front veil of anti-colonialism is drawn aside, a fair amount of background explanation has been necessary. It is this background which may be of more than ephemeral interest.

I have included in the Appendices of this book, a letter from James Puthuchear, which was confidential only as long as he was in prison and documents in the handwriting of Lim Chin Siong which speak for themselves.

James Puthuchear has tried to make out in his recent letter to the press that all this talk of Communists and Communism is a bogey, and that Lim Chin Siong is a good honest democrat. In his letter Puthuchear clearly said that he himself was a member of the Communist-controlled Anti-British League and traces the reasons for his break with them. He also explained how the Communists have systematically penetrated lawful democratic organisations to capture and subvert the leadership. The three documents in Lim Chin Siong's handwriting will dispel any pretence that he is other than what he always has been, a Communist open-front leader. James Puthuchear has always known this.

From time to time in the next few years, students of Malayan politics, foreign correspondents and newspaper men may find the documents that have been added in the appendices of reference value.

The persons who have written them, both non-Communists and Communists, are likely to continue to play an important part in the events of the next few years. For better or for

worse, we a nationalist left and they a Communist left have brought the fight, the silent struggle for supremacy over the hearts and minds of the workers and the people of Malaya, out into the open.

What they have written and what they have agreed to in writing, they may have cause to regret. But that is no reason why they should not be reminded of their solemn political undertakings given to us when we were together in an anti-colonial front.

We have also published our statements so that everybody can decide who stands in Malaya, for what kind of Malaya.

My colleagues and I in the P.A.P. are one of the few groups that have worked in a united front with the Malayan Communist Party and have not been absorbed. John Eber, Lim Kean Chye, Devan Nair, the late Dr. Joseph Tan, P. V. Sharma, and the whole group of the Malayan Democratic Union activists started off before us, in the same way, basically nationalists with radical socialist views, but non-Communist.

Their statements and documents, to which I have had access since the P.A.P. formed the government, make fascinating reading. They went in and worked with the Communists in one united front convinced that it was right to join the Communists to defeat the common enemy—British colonialism. They also anticipated a time when the British would fade out from the arena and they would have to meet the challenge from the Communists. But unlike us, in the process of the anti-colonial struggle, they were absorbed by the Communists.

There are other groups like us scattered throughout Malaya, Left-wing nationalists, not Communists, who have worked with the Communists and know them well.

Those who have travelled along similar paths may find some interest in comparing their experiences with ours. Our experience may also interest others who have yet to meet

these Communist and pro-Communist cadres in political parties, trade unions, cultural organisations, old boys' associations, student clubs and so on.

But whether we personally have to meet these Communist cadres or not, we are all none the less involved if the Communist struggle for power ever succeeds in Malaya.

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21.10.67.

I

MERGER AND THE STAKES INVOLVED

SOON YOU WILL have to decide on your future. In the next few months we shall settle the constitutional arrangements for merger. In this series of broadcasts, I hope to tell you what merger means, why it is good for all of us, why it is coming, and why some people are deliberately creating trouble and difficulty over it to prevent it from taking place.

Everybody knows that merger is inevitable. The Tungku has said merger is inevitable. The P.A.P. have also said that merger is inevitable. The Communists also admit that merger is inevitable. The inevitable is now happening. Some people can try to postpone the inevitable. But no one can stop it. The artificial division at the Causeway is a temporary one. It is only a matter of time before it is swept aside.

No political party, no one, has dared to raise his voice against merger. But you will see that quite a number of political parties and persons are deliberately being difficult about the terms and conditions in order to frustrate and delay merger between our two territories for as long as they can. It is our duty to put all the facts before you so that you can decide in full knowledge of the truth.

Merger is going to take place not just because it is the desire of the P.A.P. or merely because it is the wish of the Federation Alliance government. It is as inevitable as the rising and setting of the sun. The two territories are so intertwined and interwoven in their economic, political and military complex that no man can keep up the artificial barrier at the Causeway for long.

If merger does not come with the consent of the people of the two territories, then inevitably it will come by the

use of force by one territory over the other, because each is vital to the survival of the other.

Everyone knows the reasons why the Federation is important to Singapore. It is the hinterland which produces the rubber and tin that keep our shop-window economy going. It is the base that made Singapore the capital city. Without this economic base Singapore would not survive.

Without merger, without a reunification of our two governments and an integration of our two economies, our economic position will slowly and steadily get worse. Your livelihood will get worse. Instead of there being one unified economic development for Malaya, there will be two. The Federation instead of co-operating with Singapore will compete against Singapore for industrial capital and industrial expansion. In this competition both will suffer.

But Singapore will suffer more, because we have less resources to fall back on. We have no rubber and tin, no large land mass. For 140 years we have grown, developed and prospered because we bought and sold for the Federation. Through Singapore they imported what they wanted from the outside world. Through Singapore they sold their rubber and tin.

Merger means that there will be one integrated economic development, and that the wasteful duplication of facilities in the two territories will come to an end. We have an international airport at Paya Lebar. The Federation is also building an enormous airport costing \$50 million near Kuala Lumpur. But no international airline wants to land its aeroplanes in two such short stops—Kuala Lumpur and Singapore which are 250 miles from each other.

We have an international rubber market in Singapore. The Federation were on the point of setting up their own rubber market to compete with Singapore and take away Singapore's business. With a Singapore separated from the Federation, we will be cutting each other's throats.

Shell Co. has just built an oil refinery at Pulau Bukom in Singapore. Shell is compelled by the artificial division at the Causeway to build one twice as big at Port Dickson in the Federation. There are many such examples.

Danger of delay

If we delay merger, Singapore will be restricted in its economic expansion. People here will get worse off, with less income, less employment. They will drift back to the Federation. Half of our population in Singapore has come from the Federation because of the prosperity of Singapore. If that prosperity disappears as a result of unequal competition with the Federation, the reverse process will take place and people will drift from a stagnating Singapore to an expanding Federation.

We cannot survive alone. If we delay merger, everyone of us, no matter whether you are a worker, hawker, clerk, technician or businessman, will suffer. There will be less business. There will be less profits. There will be less pay. There will be fewer jobs.

Now let me tell you why Singapore is vital to the Federation. There is no conceivable way in which Singapore can be completely cut off from the Federation. The Causeway and the Straits of Johore are not the Maginot Line. No iron, rubber or coconut curtain is possible between us. What happens in Singapore must affect the Federation. From Singapore the Federation can be undermined. Singapore is vital to the security and survival of the Federation.

Let me give you an example. In 1960 when a Soviet mission came to Singapore to attend the ECAFE conference, there was a great deal of unhappiness in the Federation because the Russians wanted to set up a rubber-buying mission in Singapore. For the rubber-buying mission could very easily become a centre for intensive political activity against the Federation.

Singapore saw it just as an additional avenue of trade, but the Federation considered it a dangerous beginning of a

Communist offensive against them. This in a minor instance illustrates how vital Singapore is to the Federation's security.

So in any merger arrangement the Federation must insist on security being under central government control. We have already reached agreement in principle. The Federation government considers it basic that external affairs, defence and security should be under the control of the Central Pan-Malayan Government.

Communist proxies

We, on the other hand, consider it essential that Singapore should have local autonomy in education and labour policies. These seemingly non-controversial propositions have aroused a great deal of noisy protest from interested parties in Singapore.

The most important interested party is the M.C.P. They do not want to see security in the hands of the central government. They are an illegal organisation. And with security in the hands of an anti-Communist central government they fear they will be worse off.

They are unable to make any official statements to the press or through other open channels of information. But they have proxies. They have sympathisers and secret party members in the lawful political parties, in the unions, cultural organisations, and old boys' associations who make appropriate noises on their behalf.

Of course these people have not been so foolish as to oppose merger openly. They have all agreed to merger on principle. But they want a different kind of merger, one in which security is not under the control of the central government. Or if security has got to be in the hands of the central government, they ask for unreasonable and even impossible conditions which they hope will frustrate merger.

The Communists through their proxies are therefore trying to cloud and confuse this merger issue in order that you may come to the wrong decision. It is necessary for us to tell you

who are their proxies, what line they are taking, why they are taking this line, and what it all means to you.

They will try to confuse you and prevent you from seeing their hand clearly by calling all this a smear. It is up to you to listen to all sides and then decide for yourselves.

To put you in the picture, I shall tell you in my next talk a little of the background leading to our conflict with the Communists over merger. Then you can see things in perspective. Then you can judge for yourself.

September 13, 1961.

II

THE COMMUNIST CHALLENGE

MANY OF THE URGENT problems we face are related to the struggle for power of the Communist ideology and its supporters in Malaya. I shall have to talk to you about the nature of the challenge which the Communist system and the Communist Party of Malaya are posing to us in terms which may never have been used before.

For years since the beginning of the Emergency in 1948, Communism has been painted in terms of violence, terror, brutality and evil. There was violence, there was terror, there was brutality, and there were evil men. But that is not the whole story. For if it was as simple as that, the Communists would have died and perished with the collapse of their armed revolt.

It is because, together with these weaknesses, they have some strong qualities that they have been able to survive in spite of the collapse of their armed revolt.

For the foreseeable future the Communists have no chance of capturing power in the Federation or Singapore by force of arms. But they have been able to continue the struggle for the Communist cause through new methods.

Many of their old supporters in the jungle have died or been banished. Some have drifted back anonymously into the towns. Only a hard core remains on the Malayan-Thai border.

But new recruits have been found. These are the idealistic young men and women, largely from the Chinese middle schools of Malaya, both the Federation and Singapore. These are new men fighting under different conditions with different methods and tactics to create a Communist Malaya.

Partly by persuasion, mainly by fanaticism and faith that the future belongs to the Communists, these new recruits are continuing the struggle. They press on capturing the leadership of trade unions, cultural organisations and 'old boys' associations. Most important of all they try to capture the power to manipulate the lawful political parties.

Past governments called this subversion. Because the Communist Party is illegal in Malaya none of its followers go about telling people that they are Communists. Publicly they will always pretend to be democrats; privately they keep on recruiting as many effective persons as they can persuade to join them in the Communist cause.

The Communists and their supporters say that I have raised the bogey of Communism in order to confuse the people. They blame us for splitting the so-called unity of the Left and they list our failures—the failure of no intra-party democracy, the failure of not consulting them, the failure of not taking their Communist mass line and being isolated from the masses—in other words, the failure of not espousing the Communist cause. The truth is they do not want their quiet and relentless erosion of our society to be made public.

The time has come for me to tell you what is going on in Singapore, why these things are going on, and what the future is likely to be. You have to decide on your future and you must know the truth.

When I talk of these problems I shall be talking from the personal experience and knowledge which my colleagues and I have gained from over ten years of activity in the trade unions and active politics. I shall not be telling you something which I have learnt from police files or secret reports, not because those reports are not true, but because I can speak so much better of the things that I have personally seen and heard and participated in.

My colleagues and I are of that generation of young men who went through the Second World War and the Japanese Occupation and emerged determined that no one—neither the

Japanese nor the British—had the right to push and kick us around. We determined that we could govern ourselves and bring up our children in a country where we can be proud to be a self-respecting people.

When the war came to an end in 1945, there was never a chance of the old type of British colonial system ever being re-created. The scales had fallen from our eyes and we saw for ourselves that the local people could run the country.

In fact the local people did run the country for the Japanese military administration. The Europeans had a better life in our country—more pay, bigger houses, bigger cars and a higher standard of living—not because they were more capable but because power and military might were on their side.

When that power went they were stripped literally naked as prisoners of war, and became ordinary people. It was the Japanese ten-cent storeman who, backed by Japanese military might, suddenly became the big boss who occupied a big house and had a better life.

Revolt

Three years after the end of the Second World War a violent revolution started in Malaya. The Communists who were almost a non-existent force in the years before the war were allowed to arm themselves as a force just before the British surrendered. They went underground with those arms.

Over three-and-a-half years, partly with the arms they took underground and partly with more arms parachuted in by the Allies, they built up a tough little army in the jungles.

With the surrender of the Japanese, they came out into the towns. For the first time, the M.C.P. emerged as a legally recognised political force in our country. But it was not for long. In 1948 they retreated to the jungles and the armed insurrection which the British called the "Emergency" started.

That was a fierce and grim revolt. The angry young men from the Chinese middle schools, who hated colonialism and the British, joined the Communists to rid the country of British imperialism.

In those tough years, 1949 and 1950, we got our first taste of the practical realities of politics. We had learned the theories of socialism, Communism and capitalism in books, and read the histories of revolutions. But we now began to understand the meaning of revolution in terms of life and blood, liberty and incarceration, hate and fear, love and comradeship.

Realities of revolution

We have learned one important thing during the last decade: that only those count and matter, who have the strength and courage of their convictions to stick up and stand up for what they believe in, for their people, for their country, regardless of what happens to themselves.

Parts of this narrative are concerned with friends of personal courage and deep political conviction who have gone over to the Communist side. Because they have accepted the Communist doctrine and dogma, they would have not the slightest compunction if the time comes, to destroy us, the non-Communists, if we do not bend to their will.

On the other hand, other friends have been so disgusted by the stupidities of the leadership of the Communist Party that they abjured the Communists and came over and joined us at great personal peril.

So the battle goes on for the hearts and minds of the political activists of the country. Some I will be able to tell you by name. Others I shall refer to by nicknames. But they are all real living people, men of my generation, fierce men on both sides.

They will be listening to these talks wondering how much I will disclose, whether I will take an unfair advantage over them. My colleagues and I, not being ruthless Communist cadres, have different standards of conduct from theirs. With us, personal friendship and sentimental regard for old friends matter.