

SPEECH BY DATO SIR CHENG-LOCK TAN, KBE, DEMJ, JP,
AT THE SECOND MEETING OF THE NATIONAL CONVENTION
HELD IN KUALA LUMPUR ON 11TH OCTOBER, 1953.

The proposals propounded in the Report of the Special Committee of the National Convention on constitutional reforms in the Federation of Malaya, besides being of a moderate nature, are designed to constitute the first definite, decisive step towards the attainment and progressive advancement in the Federation of full responsible self-government of the representative type and eventual independence. These proposed reforms are founded on sound, sane and acknowledged principles of genuine democracy.

In most democratic countries political theorists and practical politicians look upon the electoral system, when applied to the legislative assemblies of central and local government, as an equitable expression of the sovereignty of the people.

The true type of democracy must be a government of all by all, and be representative of all and not solely of the majority.

In this democracy the opinions and interests of the minorities in spite of numerical inferiority would nevertheless obtain a hearing and an influence by reason of weighty character and force of argument. This democracy is alone true, equal, and impartial, and representative of all.

Minorities are sometimes superior in judgment to majorities. It does not necessarily follow that fifty-one people out of a hundred are wiser than forty-nine.

The most fundamental characteristic of the democratic ideal is fraternity in the sense of co-operating in a common enterprise for the common good with one's fellows and even with

roughly a 2/3 elected unofficial majority in the composition of both the Federal Executive Councils; (c) that the suffrage shall be extended to all Federal citizens and to all persons born and ordinarily resident in Malaya; and (d) the appointment of "the Leader of Government Business" who may be regarded as a potential equivalent or an approximation to the conception of the Prime Minister in the British Cabinet system.

The dictates of simple justice and reason require that all those born in Malaya who regard this country as their permanent home and the object of their loyalty should at least have the right to vote at political elections.

Those born in Malaya who have been unjustifiably deprived of their former status as British protected persons and consequently of their right to vote, while being obliged to perform the duties of citizenship, may become permanent malcontents and a source of weakness, if not of peril, to the state.

In the words of a high authority on the science of politics, "it is a personal injustice to withhold from anyone, unless for the prevention of greater evils, the ordinary privilege of having his voice reckoned in the disposal of affairs in which he has the same interest as other people. If he is compelled to pay, if he may be compelled to fight, if he is required implicitly to obey he should be legally entitled to be told what for; to have his consent asked and his opinion counted at its worth, though not at more than its worth. There ought to be no pariahs in a full-grown and civilized nation; no persons disqualified, except through their own default."

The constitutional reforms advocated in the Report of the National Convention's Special Committee would still operate within the framework of the existing Federation of Malaya Agreement and represent the minimum modicum as the initial stage in the progress of the Federation towards complete responsible self-government.

The demand for the proposed moderate, just and practicable reforms should be promptly granted by Her Majesty's Government if they are sincere in their promise to give political freedom and independence, within the Commonwealth of Free Nations to this country, which and the British territories in Borneo together with Hongkong are almost the only countries left which are still under colonial rule in this largest of continents with the most ancient civilization and cultured of the highest order in the world.

I have much pleasure in seconding the Resolution to receive, approve, and accept the Report of the Special Committee on Constitutional Reforms which has been proposed by the President of U.M.N.O., the Hon'ble Tunku Abdul Rahman.