

THAT MAN IN SINGAPORE

One day in September, 1965, the Prime Minister of Singapore — a brash, brilliant young man who has been, in spite of the separation, the thorn in the Tunku's side — called reporters to his make-do office in Singapore's City Hall.

Singapore is the tiny island-city-state south of the peninsula of Malaya. About the size of Basilan, it's small, compact, and prosperous.

Singapore's Prime Minister is Lee Kuan Yew, 42. His credentials are: a double first in Cambridge ("Something better than a summa cum laude," admirer gushed), a way with words and a cutting wit, a revolutionary background (he once worked hand in glove with the communists), and a commitment to democratic socialism.

If Lee Kuan Yew has been the thorn in the Tunku's side, he was now going to be, for a number of days, the thorn in Uncle Sam's flesh.

Lee Kuan Yew had been on the front pages of just about every newspaper in the world as a result of his disclosures on the CIA of U.S.A. In the course of a press conference, at the moment, on the huge British base in now-independent Singapore, Lee had said:

"Now, I want to be quite frank with you here. If the British withdraw I am prepared to go on with the Australians and the New Zealanders. But, I am not prepared to go on with the Americans." I shall quote from the transcript:

Creighton Burns, of *The Melbourne Age*: Why not, Mr. Prime Minister? Why do you think the Americans. . .

Prime Minister: Can I put it this way: I think they are a highly intelligent, often well-meaning, people, and some of their leaders like Mr. Kennedy, the late Pres-

ident, had signs of growing greatness, depth. But, by and large, the administration lacks depth and judgment or wisdom which comes out of an accumulation of knowledge of human beings and human situations over a long period of time. That is lacking, and it is not their fault. What have they got? Three, four hundred years of history, and they have become a nation just recently. I will tell you this. I have had three experiences, only three experiences, with the Americans. And, they did not intend any harm in each one of them. But, the tragedy was, they did real harm. First — this is old stuff now — we caught an American CIA agent trying to subvert our Intelligence Special Branch Officer, bribe him, so that the Special Branch officer will feed the CIA because the CIA wants to know what is happening. Subverting a Singapore officer! The man might have succeeded. But I am proud the officer, offered a large sum of money and continuing sums of money . . . this was in 1960 . . . refused and reported the mat-

ter to his chief who reported it to me.

Questioner: Well, don't you think . . .

Prime Minister: No, no. Let me explain. The British have 400 years of Empire, and I will come to that. This is crucial to the whole of my thinking on this. Four hundred years of Empire, and they know this place, and they know human beings. If it had been the Americans in charge, I think today I would not be here, and you would not be interviewing me. Because, they lack what one calls wisdom, i.e. a computer fed with data, judgment which comes out of long experience. I will tell you this. Trying to do that! I told my officers, "Lay a trap: microphones, everything." The man was caught, arrested, enough evidence to send him to gaol for anything up to 12 years. We had got them by the throat. The American Consul-General, shaking at his knees, knew nothing about it. And, I really believe he knew nothing about it because this man flew in from Bangkok. And, the ignominy of it! He

was not really trying. The man was looking for a place of assignation to seek comfort. Do you get confidence in an outfit like that? That is how the Bay of Pigs takes place, that sort of an operation. The man was caught, locked up, and it was on a razor's edge whether we would charge him in open court or not. Now, let me explain this. And, I told the American government, "We keep quiet, you take this man away, \$100 million to the Singapore government for economic development."

Questioner: Now . . .

Prime Minister: No, no. You listen to me. I never spoke to the Americans direct because they lack the finesse. They may say, "Yes, give it to you. Why to the Singapore government? Give it to you." to me, which would have ruined me. But through an intermediary they offered me and my Party \$10 million. The insult! I told them, "You can keep it." But I will say this for President Kennedy: that he said no, his government would give me, if I wanted, publicly, but not because I

got him by the throat. No, no. I will say this for Kennedy — I don't know if they have got other Kennedys coming; even Kennedy didn't have the full maturity. In the end, I decided to release the man because if I charged him, the damage it would have done with our relations with Kuala Lumpur then — we wanted merger, Malaysia, we fought for it — and Americans would have worked on Kuala Lumpur and we would have been so antagonistic, merger and Malaysia would have broken. They probably never knew why we released the man. We just said, "O.K., get out," And the Consul-General, who was a Rhodes scholar, I have forgotten his name now — they sent a Rhodes scholar. They thought, a bit of the English polish on him, and he can get on. Well, he resigned — or, he left, anyway. They sent a new man. That is when Mr. Gillstrap came. That is experience No. 1.

Now, let me explain this to you. It is fundamental. If the British bases go, there will be no American bases in Singapore. This is a mat-

ter of the utmost importance for Britain, Australia, New Zealand, and for America to understand that.

Second traumatic experience: etc. etc.

The U.S. government had, as expected, denied the existence of such an incident.

Lee Kuan Yew now was calling in the reporters to make public a letter of apology from Dean Rusk, the U.S. secretary of state — a document confirming that there had, indeed, been such a scandal.

"I have never lied in my public life," Lee Kuan Yew said. "If the Americans stupidly go on denying the undeniable, I shall play the tape on Radio Singapore.

Before him on a table lay red lined yellow folder marked "Top Secret" — "the complete file," wrote Jackie Sam of the Straits Times, "on the CIA agent who came from Bangkok in 1960, and tried to buy over a Singapore Special Branch officer to keep him supplied with information, for which he was prepared to keep on paying."

There was no doubt of it,

Lee Kuan Yew had got the poor chaps by the throat.

Excitement over this incident has died down, but while it simmered, newspapermen had managed to revive stories about CIA intrigue in Cambodia, Laos, Indonesia, Vietnam, and, supposedly, in the precipitation of the Indian-Pakistan war. Lee Yew, meanwhile, was being projected as the man to watch in Asia, as the new emerging voice in the Afro-Asian block. Sure enough, Kuan Yew was back in the limelight in a few days with a suggestion to form a regional multilateral defense system to replace Western military influence in Asia. It embarrasses Lee Kuan Yew to be reminded that "blonde men with guns are defending Asia." "What to do?" Lee Kuan says. "I have just go to grin and bear it for a while."

The British in Singapore?

"I do not think it is just love and affection for Singapore and sentimental reasons.

"She has got a role to play — to counterbalance with the Americans in Europe. If they play a role here then

they have got more voice about the disposition of affairs in Europe."

Now a member of the UN — one of the tiniest nations to make the club — Singapore makes no bones about its foreign policy.

"You might say it's one of non-alignment." S. Rajaratnam, minister of external affairs, explained, as we sat down in the small ante-room of his City Hall office. Suddenly independent as a result of the so-called "break-away," Singapore's national offices have had to be housed

in city government buildings, which were now being remodelled and repainted to make room for the new set of national officials.

"The less we get involved, avoiding entanglements on issues of no direct concern to us, the better. The politics of small nations need not be based on the assumption that your friends are my friends, or your enemies, our enemies . . . Now in cases of mutual interest, that would be different. We modify the basic line." — *Jose Luna Castro in the Manila Times, Oct. 12, 1965.*

THE LETTER OF APOLOGY FROM DEAN RUSK, U.S. SECRETARY OF STATE

Dear Mr. Prime Minister:

I am deeply distressed to learn that certain officials of the United States Government have been engaged in improper activities in Singapore. I want you to know that I regret very much that this unfortunate incident has occurred to mar the friendly relations that exist between our Governments. The new Administration takes a very serious view of this matter and intends to review the activities of these officials for disciplinary action.

Sincerely yours,
Dean Rusk