



Presentation of

A BOOKCASE AND BOOKS

TO THE

PARLIAMENT OF SINGAPORE

Held in

THE LIBRARY, PARLIAMENT HOUSE, SINGAPORE

On Wednesday, 16th November, 1966

at 10.00 a.m.

(REPORT OF PROCEEDINGS)

PRESENTATION OF
A BOOKCASE AND BOOKS
TO THE
PARLIAMENT OF SINGAPORE
BY THE
UNITED KINGDOM HOUSE OF COMMONS

*Report of Proceedings held in the Library, Parliament House, Singapore
on 16th November, 1966*

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1967

UNITED KINGDOM HOUSE OF COMMONS DELEGATION

The Rt. Hon. Charles Pannell, M.P. ... Leader of
(Labour — Leeds, West) Delegation

The Rt. Hon. William F. Deedes, M.C., M.P. Deputy Leader
(Conservative — Ashford) of Delegation

Hon. Samuel C. Silkin, Q.C., M.P.
(Labour — Dulwich)

Capt. Walter Elliot, D.S.C., M.P.
(Conservative — Carshalton)

Mr. James D. G. Davidson, M.P.
(Liberal — Aberdeenshire, West)

Accompanied by

Mr. A. C. Marples, C.B.E.
(Clerk of Committees)

PRESENTATION OF A BOOKCASE AND BOOKS TO THE PARLIAMENT HOUSE OF SINGAPORE BY THE UNITED KINGDOM HOUSE OF COMMONS ON 16TH NOVEMBER, 1966

Members of the Delegation *arrived at Parliament House at 9.45 a.m. They were met on their arrival by the Acting Clerk of Parliament and invited to Mr. Speaker's Chambers.*

Members of Parliament *and Guests took their seats in the Library by 9.55 a.m.*

Mr. Speaker *made his entrance into the Library.*

The Serjeant at Arms, *leading the Delegation, stood at the entrance to the Library and announced:*

“Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Delegation of the Commons’ House of Parliament of Great Britain and Northern Ireland,”

and conducted them up the aisle to Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker *greeted the Delegation and invited them to be seated.*

10.00 a.m.

Mr. Speaker (Mr. P. Coomaraswamy): Members of the Delegation, it gives me great pleasure to extend to you a very warm welcome to Singapore and to our House. You represent the United Kingdom House of Commons and you do so in a most representative way. In ages, you range from a mature 39 to a very youthful 64. A visit to each of your constituencies will take one throughout the United Kingdom. Similarly, in education and calling one finds very wide representation. Cambridge is perhaps over-represented but that is also true of our Government benches in the House.

Politically, your composition would appear to have been worked out by a mathematician who applied a formula and achieved a result in round numbers. And he has been crafty enough to include a very gentle hint of the House of Lords.

You bring with you a gift from the United Kingdom House of Commons and the gestation and delivery of this gift provides an interesting study and illustrates parliamentary processes in England.

On the 2nd August, 1963, when the establishment of Malaysia was imminent, Mr. Harold Wilson, then Leader of the Opposition, asked the Prime Minister, Mr. Harold Macmillan, what proposals he had for the presentation of gifts to mark the occasion. In reply, Mr. Macmillan said that Her Majesty's Government propose the House should offer a gift to the legislature of Singapore amongst others.

Since then, as you know, there have been some changes. After one change of Prime Minister and two general elections it fell to Mr. Herbert Bowden, as Lord President of the Council in the Government of the questioner of August 1963 to move the formal resolution for the presentation.

The changes have not, of course, all been one-sided. We have not changed Prime Ministers. We have changed in status instead. A gift that was meant to mark the inauguration of Malaysia now comes to us to mark the establishment of Singapore as an independent and sovereign nation in the Commonwealth. We are happy indeed to have you with us, and we hope you will be able to see what makes Singapore tick and how in the present context we are determined to see that parliamentary democracy works.

Before I invite the Rt. Hon. Charles Pannell to address us, I must mention that I do so with some trepidation. He is an authority on parliamentary practice and procedure. He, very properly, has very stern views on the removal of Speakers from the political arena. On occasion, he has even pulled up Speakers. One of the lesser known of his achievements is his having successfully prevented the sale of a Speaker's hat to raise funds for a political party. Mr. Charles Pannell.

The Rt. Hon. Charles Pannell, M.P. (Labour — Leeds, West) (Leader of Delegation): Mr. Speaker, Sir, Mr. Deputy Prime Minister and distinguished guests, first of all, I would like to thank, on behalf of the Delegation, all those who have conspired to make our visit a memorable one, for the courtesy of the Prime Minister in giving so much of his time yesterday, and the Deputy Prime Minister, and not only that but the kindness that we have received everywhere.

Mr. Speaker, you did have a word or two to say about my Delegation. I would like to say a word or two more. I hope that this is a representative Delegation, because the Deputy Leader, Mr. Deedes, is an ex-Cabinet Minister. But even more remarkable than that, his family have been in Kent, the county in which I live, for about 500 years and I do not think since Charles II, we have been without "Deedes" as well as words in the House of Commons! He was a distinguished soldier and won the Military Cross in the war. He is a journalist.

Mr. Silkin, again, is the second generation of notable Parliamentarians. His father, I think, is not only an honoured but revered figure who has taken an interest very late in life in pioneering Bills on family planning which is of great interest to Singapore, and his having passed the allotted span of three score years and ten brings in fresh draughts of life for the sheer benefit that he can bring to others. He, of course, has knowledge of this part of the world. He presided at a trial for war crimes in this part of the world in 1945-46.

Capt. Walter Elliot won the Distinguished Service Cross during the war. He is a distinguished athlete, a boxer, a rugby international, and has a great interest in aviation.

Mr. Davidson has interest here in so far as he sailed in as a Lieutenant in the Royal Navy into Tokyo on D-Day. And we are grateful to have with us Mr. Marples, who is one of the Committee Clerks in the House of Commons, and I really do not know what we would do without them. A book has just been written on the Officers of the House, that they are the people who from time to time make us look rather more intelligent than we are.

Therefore, this Delegation brings fraternal greetings from all Parties in the United Kingdom to Singapore. The bookcase that we present was designed in the Ministry of Public Buildings and Works while I was Minister. Some of my colleagues think that the style of the bookcase is a trifle austere, but what it lacks in decoration it makes up in usefulness.

I would like to say a word or two about the House of Commons. We are 630 Members, from which number I estimate 620 are extroverts. There is no real time for introverts in the House of Commons. I am not going to say how many of those are megalomaniacs! We have got to remember that when people speak of the great days in the House of Commons, we would want to know what those great days were. A hundred years ago, of course, we had Disraeli and Gladstone and the great gladiators. But now all statistics prove that more Members want to speak than ever before. They all want to take part. There is a higher standard of literacy, and all Members tell me that speeches are better. The House of Commons is not of a diminishing quality. I hold sternly that it is an increasing one. And Members of the British House of Commons today see their jobs rather more largely than their predecessors did. They are not only national representatives but they have to be very much concerned with the welfare of their constituents. Against this background, we remember, with regard to Singapore, that it was in 1824 that Sir Stamford Raffles came here and so, after 140 years of British rule, self-government has come to this Island as the twenty-second nation of the Commonwealth.

I would now like to say a word or two about the Mission. There is no object to this Mission, no reason for its coming here except the bringing of goodwill. We were besieged by your reporters when we came here. They thought we were a fact-finding Mission. They wondered what we were going to say to the Prime Minister or what he was going to say to us. All I can say is that we have not come for any of these things at all. We have merely come to express the goodwill that the Mother of Parliament feels for her twenty-second offspring. Some people tend to think that Britain has a lesser place in the world as she ceased to be a great imperial power. I do not think so at all, because I do not think nations are judged that way. And I would echo some words of one of our greatest Parliamentarians, Aneurin Bevan, when he said, "As we discard the trappings of empire, we must learn to be great in other ways."

Now, your House of Commons and ours is about politics, and I think that jointly we should agree that we must not have our craft played down. There is a tendency sometimes to think that politicians are somehow lesser breeds within the law. An American definition of a politician is a politician who is fixed and stays fixed, but we do not agree to that at all. I remember some words that appeared in Lord Dalton's autobiography which said that politics is not a gabble of selfish interests, as it sometimes seems in clouded moments, but it is the State in action, and the State is the defender of the people against tyranny. The State is the great conspiracy against hunger and cold, against misery and ignorance. It defends the people from economic distress. It is the warden of the arts, the custodian of all culture. The State is all that redeems from despair this strange adventure we call human life.

Sir, I am rather glad that this Delegation has to present books rather than a mace. A mace, after all, is something that was once the symbol of barbarism that has now become the symbol of civilisation. At a pinch, Parliamentarians could do without the mace, but they could not do without books, because it is a fact of all politics — and I speak after 45 years of it — that no man can give out of himself more than he is prepared to put in. Therefore, my advice to a young man entering politics is to tend rather to ignore the weeklies and read books, the good roast beef, as we would say, and the Yorkshire pudding of politics.

Sir, you were kind enough to mention me. I suppose I ought to say, on behalf of myself, that I represent the catholicity of the British House of Commons in so far as I am an Essex-born near Cockney domiciled in Kent and represent Yorkshire Constituency.

Now about the books themselves. These are a representative selection of Parliamentary works and any Member of Parliament here who reads the lot has my deepest sympathy. But among them, you will find much good stuff. The present Members of Parliament in England are represented among the authors. If I had to choose one for a first choice which I would ask people to read, it would be "The British Cabinet" by John Mackintosh, who is a new Member and who recently entered for one of the Scottish constituencies and made a most brilliant maiden speech. This is a standard work and is one of the best guides to British politics I know. But, of course, there is Michael Stewart who is the First Secretary now. He is marked here with "The British Approach to Politics" and Patrick Gordon Walker on "The Commonwealth". There are colleagues of mine within the City of Leeds, Dr. Wiseman and Hanson, represented here, and one of the wisest Parliamentarians of all times, Herbert Morrison. These then are the books that we bring. We bring them not because they represent the distilled wisdom of the British Parliament, not with any idea that Singapore should take these as necessarily any examples for the path that you tread. Politics is indigenous. It springs from your own history and your own traditions. We only bring these books as a token of goodwill, of the affection that the whole of the British people feel towards you, and the sympathy that they will always extend to this part of the world, for the name of Singapore is emotive in British history.

Thank you very much.

Mr. Speaker: I now ask the Rt. Hon. William F. Deedes to address you.

The Rt. Hon. William F. Deedes, M.C., M.P. (Conservative — Ashford) (Deputy Leader of Delegation): Mr. Speaker, Deputy Prime Minister and distinguished guests, it gives me the greatest pleasure to support my colleague, Mr. Charles Pannell, on this occasion. We speak, as you, Mr. Speaker, have already mentioned, on behalf of the three Parties, a group worked out with mathematical exactitude and forming a united delegation. I am inclined to think that even if we had not started united, 24 hours inside a B.O.A.C. Boeing 707 would have compressed us into unity. The House of Commons is a large place where a Member can escape, if he wishes, from the society of his colleagues. But in a Boeing jet,

you must either get on with those who are with you or jump out, and, as you can see, no one has jumped out! You may, therefore, assume that we are totally united. We speak on this occasion with one voice to which I am now very glad to add.

I am not only pleased but I am very proud to take part in this presentation to you. I think it is quite truthful to say that no part of the Commonwealth is better known in England than Singapore, and, unlike some parts of the Commonwealth, you have seen wise enough to retain your historic name with its historic and highly romantic associations. Because of that, I think most of our school children could point to this island on the map if they were asked to. I would like to feel that these same children will also grow up conscious of its very important associations for them as well as for you. I wish, incidentally, that they could see the quite admirable brochure called "One Year of Independence" which some of us have had the pleasure of looking at since we came. Technically, it is quite one of the best things I have seen — and I speak on a professional note here, because in the office, it was part of my job to try, quite unsuccessfully, to produce publications of that kind.

Sir, we for our part count ourselves very lucky to be able to see for ourselves, even for a few days, the abundant examples of your development at this tremendously important stage in your fortunes. I, like most of us here in this Delegation, have some modest yardstick by which to measure this progress. I had the pleasure of being here in 1963 when, may I say in all sincerity, I first formed a profound admiration for your Prime Minister, an admiration, I am happy to tell you, which I think is now widely shared in Britain, not only for his part in the recent Commonwealth Conference, but also because the British public saw him on television where he shone. If you can shine on British television, you are three parts a hero.

Now my colleague, Mr. Pannell, has broadly hinted, our mission today is to present to you this cabinet of books. We hope that they will be of service to you. You will probably be wondering how many of these books we ourselves have read. Speaking for myself — the others must answer this for themselves — I think the important thing is to know where reference can be made, to know where to find it. This saves an enormous amount of reading and it also very much assists your home work. If I were to single out one volume — and since Mr. Pannell has done this, I do not see why I should not — for reading above all others, I think I would fasten upon "The Control of Public Expenditure" by Basil Chubb. Sir, this surely is very close to the secret of happy, perhaps eternal government. If you could find the secret of that — I see it now out of the corner of my eye "The Control of Public Expenditure" — then I think all things will be granted unto you. As Mr. Aneurin Bevan, who has already been quoted this morning, once said, "Why look in the crystal if you can read the book?" And when I return to Westminster, one of the first things I intend to do is to find out what has happened to our copy of this book and how long it has been missing.

If I might mention one other volume which catches my eye, it would be "Government and Parliament" by Herbert Morrison. He was incidentally a former Member of Mr. Pannell's Party, not mine, which shows how united and generous

we get on these visits. I say that not only because I have read and admired this book but because it is, among all these books, one that was written by a practitioner. Herbert Morrison was a great practitioner of parliamentary government and nobody knew more about it than he did. This is not to say that I could not also think of one or two titles or subjects which I would like to see included in that cabinet. For myself, I would have added a book on golf. Golf plays a great part in politics today. It is, after all, harder to control your swing than either the Right- or the Left-wing of any particular Party. One of the best-kept secrets of this year is the result of the golf match that was played between your Prime Minister and our Prime Minister during the Commonwealth Conference. I know one or two secrets about your Prime Minister's game. He was taught by the same man who taught me.

Sir, let me end by thanking you most warmly for your kindness and your hospitality and the friendliness that we have already found on all hands here and which you have seen fit to bestow on our modest mission. For all who care about parliamentary democracy, this is another milestone. I think it was Winston Churchill who once said, "Parliamentary democracy is a very bad system. But no one has yet found a better." And that, if you think of it, is profoundly true. It is perhaps worth remembering when things go wrong or when you feel a little dispirited, as we all do from time to time, about the way things are working out.

Sir, may this Parliament prosper and may this Island whose affairs it will administer prosper too. May it go well with you. And you know at least that there are now five British Parliamentarians whose heartfelt wish it is on this occasion and beyond this occasion that it shall go well with you. Thank you very much.

The Rt. Hon. Charles Pannell: Mr. Speaker, these are some of the representative books that I spoke about. But, of course, they are just symbolic of the larger riches that are here. I do hope that your Members of Parliament here will get a great deal of pleasure out of them, and I need not say again how much we have enjoyed bringing them to you.

The Rt. Hon. Charles Pannell handed three books to Mr. Speaker who handed them to the Librarian.

Mr. Speaker: Mr. Pannell and Members of the Delegation, let me thank you very much on behalf of the House for this magnificent gift and the very useful books that it contains. This is one sure way in which we shall always be reminded of the goodwill that you have brought to us and expressed to us. Thank you very much.

I have no doubt that at the appropriate time and place appropriate action will be taken. May I ask you to join us in our reception?

Mr. Speaker then conducted the Delegation out of the Library to the Members' Room.