

SINGAPORE GOVERNMENT PRESS STATEMENT

MC.AP.30/64(FIN)

SPEECH BY THE FINANCE MINISTER, DR. GOH KENG SWEE,
AT THE LAYING OF THE FOUNDATION STONE CEREMONY AT
BUONA VISTA YOUTH LEADERSHIP TRAINING CENTRE ON
WEDNESDAY, 15TH APRIL, 1964 AT 6.00 P.M.

One of the universal traits of the modern age is a built-in mechanism towards inequality in so many aspects of life. If we look at the world to-day, we see the rich countries grow richer while so many of the poor countries struggle in economic stagnation. So the gap between rich and poor nations widens and this inequality remains a constant source of international tension and friction.

Within developing countries too, the process of inequality is constantly at work. If you have made a million dollars, it is not difficult to make another million. If you start from scratch, your chances of becoming a millionaire are negligible. If we allow a free-for-all in our society and do nothing to protect the poor and curb the rich, then an acute situation will arise with the rich monopolising the wealth while the weak go to the wall.

A socialist government will not tolerate such a situation. Through taxation policies, the worst excesses of economic inequality may be avoided. Labour policies give protection to the workers against exploitation. An enlightened education programme broadens the opportunities available to talent, whatever its social origins. A social welfare programme gives succour to casualties who through some misfortune are unable to provide for themselves. A housing policy provides decent homes to those who otherwise might have to continue to live in slums.

We have gone a long way in these matters in Singapore. There is yet much more to do and, no doubt, the coming years will see further progress within the limitations imposed by our resources. But there is one field in which our efforts do not measure up to our efforts elsewhere. This field is none other than that of youth work.

There are some people who say that youth work is not really a matter for Government, and that young people should be left to themselves to do what they like. I disagree with this view, if for not other reason than that these very same people will blame the Government for not adequately curbing the activities of gangsters. Similarly, these persons will be the first to lose their nerve should the present state of political tranquility come to an abrupt end as a result, let us say, of the successful subversion of young people to anti-national or anti-social causes.

I suspect that those who believe in the negative attitude to youth work come from well-to-do homes which can give its younger members many opportunities for interesting and worthwhile activities. They forget that the majority of families in Singapore are not as fortunately placed as theirs.

Let us be courageous enough to admit that the problems we face with our youth - the menace of secret society gangsters, the ease with which a large element of our youth can be seduced to disloyal causes - let us admit that these troubles arose out of past neglect. In the same manner, let us resolve to mount a massive effort and meet these problems head-on.

The establishment of the Youth Leadership Training Centre signifies the Government's intention to do so. Though I am not an expert in youth work, I have been a keen observer and I may perhaps be permitted to say a few words on the Training Centre - what it hopes to achieve, how it works and so on.

First to correct some commonly-held misconceptions on the nature of youth work. Too many people, unfortunately, believe that youth work consists in running basket-ball teams, ping pong tournaments and that sort of thing. No doubt sporting events appeal to young people and they are important to any youth movement. But sports are not the basic activity.

A successful youth movement must base its appeal not merely to the body but also to the spirit and the intellect of our young people. It is a trite observation - but nonetheless true for that - that young people have a capacity for idealism and dedication which is rare among grown-ups many of whom, perhaps, have been made sour and cynical by the harshness of life. I believe that a dynamic youth movement must be able to inspire idealism among its members and sustain their dedication to noble causes.

While a youth movement should have these lofty purposes, it will come to nought if it is unable effectively to perform its day to day practical operations. For this purpose a large complement of trained youth leaders is required. Youth leadership requires not only the proper temperament and attitudes in a person but also a high proficiency in certain skills which can be acquired only by adequate training. In advanced countries, youth leadership is no longer a matter for the enthusiastic amateur. It is a recognised profession, entry into which is obtained only after rigorous training and experience, as in any other profession.

The establishment of the Youth Leadership Training Centre in Singapore means that we are now taking this step of creating a new profession of youth leaders. It is an important innovation in social policy and one which, if successful, will have profound and far-reaching effects in many spheres of life.

I will not try to forecast how the youth movement will develop for I do not myself see with sufficient clarity the multifarious problems of growth which it must encounter. But I wish to make two observations. The first is that it will be a costly business. The second is that if we are not prepared to meet this cost, the losses we shall have to sustain will be immeasurably greater.

In conclusion I wish to record my appreciation of the devoted work put into this project by Mr. Arieh Levy. I also wish to thank all those who have assisted him in getting through the first course of training for youth instructors. A challenging task awaits all those who are or will be taking part in this work and all of us here will wish to join me in wishing them every success in their future endeavours.

APRIL 15, 1964.

(Time issued: 1400 hours)