

SINGAPORE GOVERNMENT PRESS STATEMENT

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TEXT OF SPEECH BY THE MINISTER OF STATE FOR EDUCATION,
 DR. LEE CHIAW MENG, AT THE 21ST ANNIVERSARY AND INSTALLA-
 TION RITE OF THE JUNIOR CHAMBER OF SINGAPORE AT THE SEA
 VIEW HOTEL, ON SATURDAY, DECEMBER 5, 1970, AT 7.30 P.M.

We are all familiar with what makes us tick today: the human resources, the infrastructure, the strategic location. One of the major contributing factors for our success is that we do not have an indigencous and deep social class division. There is a very high social mobility. Being a society mainly of immigrant stock, it must be so. Immigrants are generally adventurous, highly motivated, achievement orientated and individualistic. A classed society could not exist with this sort of human digits. All these characteristics make up a competitive society where you could not brand the man with the stamp of a class.

In this connection, I would like to make some reference to a study in 1969, of the Nanyang University students conducted by Prof. Andrew Lind, a Visiting Professor of Sociology of that University. In the study of the student profile, there is a section dealing with the education attainment by the parents of the students. The statistic is rather revealing. I would deal only with the education attainment of the father. One-fifth of the students claimed that their fathers had received no formal education and more than half had not completed primary education. Twenty-two point one per cent of the fathers were reported to have completed secondary education with only 6.1 per cent having completed university or post-graduate training. In other words, 94 per cent of the students are receiving better education than their fathers.

Table: Highest Level of Formal Education
 Attained by Father

<u>Level of Education</u>	<u>Percentage</u>	<u>Cumulative Percentage</u>
No formal education	20.7	20.7
Primary	51.1	71.8
Secondary	22.1	93.9
University	6.1	
	100.0	

(Source: A.W. Lind, 1969: "A study of Nanyang University students and their community outlook")

It was revealed in the same survey that 12.4 per cent or one-eighth of the students are themselves immigrants, while just over three-quarters or 77.2 per cent are second generation immigrants.

I would like to add that during the period under study, the Nanyang University, together with the Singapore University, has taken in the cream of our student population and some of the best brains in this region through a free and competitive matriculation exercise.

Some foreign sociologists will marvel at this statistic that so many have found their way to the university, despite their humble family background and handicapped environment. This phenomenon may be attributed to the strong eastern intellectual tradition. I do not think this is the whole story. A brief study of our society itself may offer some explanation. Ours is a highly competitive and highly achievement orientated society. The way to the top is according to merits and performances and not according to birth or social class or family background. There is an equal opportunity for everyone who has the perseverance to apply himself to hard work. There are equal opportunities in education for everyone from primary to university.

I do not know if you have made a survey of the background of your members. I would imagine that a substantial percentage of your membership belongs to this group: the first and second generation immigrant; although I do not think this percentage is anywhere near the figure I just quoted for the Nanyang University. Your members belong to what one may generally call the professional and middle or affluent class. As the product of this exciting and dynamic social process, you are in a better position to add on the impetus of the movement itself, by activating even greater mobility and even higher target.

I have just learned from your president-elect that the motto of your Junior Chamber is 'Leadership development through community development'. I must confess that I do not understand what it means exactly nor how you intend to go about doing it.

'Leadership' and 'Community Service' appear to be the favourite themes for most professional groups. There have been apparently endless series of heated public debates, forums and seminars on the many related subjects, ranging from urbanisation and national service to the all time favourite on education. This, indeed, is a very healthy demonstration of democracy at work. Interposed in between there are the many fund-raising campaigns and organised activities for the handicapped. All these are for a very noble cause, and indeed, much3/-

indeed, much has been achieved in what you set out to do. Sometimes, however, I do wonder how many of the professional, especially the younger members, do really get away from the conference room to participate in community work as a regular undertaking, such as serving in the Citizens' Consultative Committee or the Management Committee of Community Centre. As educated people who are in a better position to lead, the young professionals and executives are grossly under-represented in this particular aspects of community work, although I am aware that many doctors and engineers are already serving in such capacity. Most of them shy away from such activities for various reasons, some not without justification. I am only aware of one single case where there is an organised effort of such a group in this area. I am referring to the SPASA which in 1968 fielded some 17 members to serve in various constituencies. I may add, with some pride, that I was involved in pioneering this project.

Some of the educated have been contributing to the well-being of the community through serving in various statutory boards, where rightly or wrongly, most feel that that is where they belong and can best serve. But as people in the position of leadership unless you are totally committed to the society and refrain from giving the impression of being enclosed in elite class, you will be failing in your duty.

It is amazing to note that many young intellectuals consider themselves as such with the usual in-breeding among themselves. Many of them have emerged from the same humble background. It is not unknown that there are some young affluent executives who would enthusiastically defend the socialistic principle and human right in public, but would in the same breath accuse the PAP Government of turning Singapore into a police state when their nose is being rasped by the anti-vice squad. That is double standard, typical of a classed society.

On the subject of education and national service, this is even more apparent. Many want to send their children to school abroad would accuse the Government for not allowing them to do so freely. They believe that their children would get better education overseas but prominent educationists would dismiss this belief. It is also completely out of question to have special schools here for the children of the professional and the affluent. Let me quote the case of studying in U.K. where there is an agreement that all students have to be sponsored by the Public Service Commission. The number of sponsored male students pursuing secondary education in U.K. in 1969 was more than double the

number for 1966, just before the National Service was introduced; the number of female students remained almost unchanged. I may add that during that period, there had been no major changes in our education system except the development in technical education. There has been a spate of heated debate in the Press recently on this issue and I do not intend to deal with it any further.

Singapore succeeds because we do not have a deep class division but instead we have a high social mobility. And if we are to push forward, then we cannot possibly allow a class society to exist.

It is definitely by no coincidence that in the quotation of Mao, the subject of 'Classes and Class Struggle' follows immediately that on the Communist Party. It is the class hatred, together with the animosity and antagonism that the Communist, and indeed all revolutions, whether inspired or otherwise, thrive on.

We have travelled this far to have built up a society of equal opportunities where premium is paid for merits and performances; a society attractive enough for the best brains, who know no national frontier, to stay; and it is up to us to make it an even better place for our children.

With that note may I wish you success in achieving the target laid down in your motto, and I look forward to meeting you more often, not in the same luxurious surroundings, but in the more intimate atmosphere at the meetings of consultative committees, at the community centres or at the usual intellectual debates.

DECEMBER 5, 1970.

(Time issued: 1630 hours)