

Speech by Mr. L.P. Rodrigo, Parliamentary Secretary, Ministry of Home Affairs, at the Singapore Junior Chamber of Commerce Banquet for the Outstanding Young Singaporean Awards at Hotel Malaysia Supper Club at 7.15 p.m. on 4th August, 1972.

Society Building

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Mr. Chairman,

Let me thank you instantly for your invitation to this evening's function. I consider myself privileged in being asked to address this gathering and present the awards to four outstanding Singaporeans. They are not, I am sure, the only young outstanding Singaporeans. Suffice it to say that even in these matters of high intent, very mundane considerations like the cost of awards have a stifling effect.

The object of this presentation is laudable. It seeks the involvement of the young in community service - something which does not easily happen these days. Today, the young have considerable opportunity and means to fashion more exciting happenings for themselves. But the reason why our young, or for that matter, ourselves, are not inclined towards community service as much as we should, is perhaps found in the way we developed as a people.

Largely developing from an immigrant community of peoples who had forsaken a sterile existence for a life of opportunity and enterprise here in Singapore, our society today reflects through the character of some of us, a streak of unbridled self-interestedness. While some may argue that this human inclination had accounted for progress and even civilisation, I believe that it holds no such promise for us here in Singapore.

Under colonial rule, we did not develop as a society as such. In the development of a society, among other assumptions, there is the

main assumption that it is desirable to promote the collective interests of the society first. This is personally accepted by the members composing the society and it serves as a principle of individual action. But throughout the years under colonial rule we were encouraged to develop as distinct racial communities and our immigrant character of self-interestedness was allowed rampant expression as long as it served the designs of the colonial rulers. I think that whatever was achieved by the way of society-building in the colonial era was achieved through private organisations which encouraged community service.

The quest of the individual in our society today for a peaceful, sufficient and happy life is conducted within the highly organised and co-ordinated political, economic and social apparatus in the State, which are geared towards providing the people with the common good. This is the same way to the good life for us collectively. The quest will be frictionless and rewarding if we have learnt through effort and experience to contain the vigour of our self-interestedness for the interests of society as a whole. If our country is to continue to prosper in peace and harmony, I think it is important we acquire in large measure and in as short a time as possible the awareness that our real long term interests lie in the acquisitions of society rather than in our individual acquisitions alone.

The merit of this evening's awards is that they encourage our young to subordinate their self-interestedness to the interests of the community through service in its behalf. This is the preparation for that basic assumption of a society which I had earlier mentioned.

I certainly hope that this project by the Junior Chamber of Commerce succeeds as it makes a positive contribution to nation building and I congratulate them for the novel idea.

It leaves me to congratulate the first winners of the outstanding young Singaporean awards and perhaps to point out to them that their worth has not been the extent of community service which individually each of them has performed, but the extent of interest in community service that each of them has managed to engender in their friends.

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