

PRESS STATEMENT FROM THE PRIME MINISTER'S OFFICE

At the request, and with the approval, of the Central Committee of the National Trades Union Congress, Mr Ong Teng Cheong will be elected to take over from Mr Lim Chee Onn as Secretary-General of the NTUC with effect from 9 May 1983. Mr Ong Teng Cheong will relinquish his Ministerial responsibilities but will remain a member of the Cabinet as Minister without Portfolio.

Mr Lim Chee Onn will remain a member of the NTUC Central Committee for such time as is necessary to help Mr Ong Teng Cheong to settle down to his new duties. He will continue as Minister without Portfolio pending assignment to a Ministry.

Mr Ong Pang Boon and Mr E W Barker will take charge of the Ministries of Communications and Labour respectively while continuing with their present responsibilities.

Attached is an exchange of letters.

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12 APRIL 83

TIME ISSUED: 1800 HRS

9 April 1983

Mr Lim Chee Onn
Secretary-General
National Trades Union Congress

Dear Chee Onn,

In September last year I informed you that, after the preparatory work for the 1983 NWC negotiations had been completed, you would leave the NTUC to take charge of a Government ministry and Ong Teng Cheong would take over from you as Secretary-General.

I arrived at this decision after closely following your relations with union leaders since Devan Nair relinquished his position in the NTUC in October 1981. I decided that the change was necessary because the process of meshing in the scholars and professionals with the rank-and-file union leaders was not progressing well.

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In the past year I have sensed increasing disquiet among some of the older union leaders at the way in which the affairs of the NTUC were being conducted. They welcomed the recruitment into the NTUC of scholars and professionals and recognised that professional expertise was needed for the efficient running of the NTUC and its auxiliary organisations. However, they began to feel that important decisions were being made without adequate consultations with them.

If this is not corrected they will lost their sense of active participation in their own movement.

By temperament and personality Ong Teng Cheong is more likely to succeed in welding together the professionals and union leaders within a minimum of friction. You can help to effect a smooth changeover by remaining a member of the NTUC Central Committee for as long as is necessary to assist Teng Cheong to pick up the threads of the NTUC organisation and its diverse offshoots.

Induction of talent into the NTUC must go on. The relevance and vitality of the NTUC in the 1980s depends on our successfully injecting a sufficient number of able, balanced and dedicated scholars and professionals into the NTUC organisation. At our meeting with the Central Committee on Friday, 8 April, I was encouraged by the Central Committee's ready acceptance of Teng Cheong as your successor, and by their continuing commitment to self-renewal.

What we have achieved must not be frittered away. However painful, we must bring problems out into the open and take corrective action before irreparable damage is done.

Yours sincerely

Signed
LEE KUAN YEW

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11 Apr 83

Prime Minister
Prime Minister's Office
Istana Annexe
Singapore 0922

Dear Prime Minister

Please refer to your letter of 9 April 1983.

I am sorry that things have not worked out as we had hoped for when I joined the NTUC in August 1977. In retrospect I believe that the problems, which you mentioned, were caused in part by my natural reticence which made communication and rapport with my colleagues in the NTUC Central Committee unnecessarily difficult.

I will give Ong Teng Cheong my full support and will assist in any capacity that he thinks fit and for as long as is necessary for a smooth handover. I am confident that my colleagues in the Central Committee will likewise help in the changeover.

It is hard to break links which have been forged over six years. But personal feelings must be set aside if the NTUC and the unions are to remain healthy and vigorous to play their role in Singapore's social and economic transformation.

I accept your decision and the reasons which you have given. My leaving the NTUC will in no way diminish my affection for the NTUC or my support for labour movement.

Yours sincerely

Signed
LIM CHEE ONN

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