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GUIDANCE FOR YOUTH CONVENTION

Speech by Dr Lee Chiav Meng, Minister for Education

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- 1 Guidance and counselling work does not confine itself only to schools and it embraces more than just vocational guidance. It covers a much wider area such as the preventive and remedial work on problematic and maladjusted children. I have no doubt that various aspects of guidance and counselling will be dealt with in depth during the forums and workshop sessions of this Convention. Therefore, I shall confine myself to making some observations on certain aspects of vocational guidance.
- 2 Guidance and counselling service in schools really began in 1963 when every secondary school was asked to appoint a career master or mistress to help school leavers in the choice of careers. Therefore, it is to be expected that school counselling service in Singapore is strongly orientated towards vocational guidance. Each year, the Guidance Unit of the Ministry has been organising various activities to advise students on the choice of suitable careers and to supply them with information on training and employment opportunities available. These include such activities as career talks and forums, exhibitions, Youth Week in Commerce and Industries, etc. It gained further momentum in 1968 with the establishment of the Technical Education Department. Despite the fact that guidance service in school is operating **under** limited resources both in terms of trained personnel and facilities, it has progressed fairly satisfactorily. However, there is much room for improvement.
- 3 Ideally, vocational guidance and counselling should be concerned with self-fulfilment in terms of the interests, abilities and aptitudes of every individual student. We do not, however, live in an ideal world. Vocational guidance and counselling has therefore, to be related to job opportunities which are in turn dependent on our economic development.
- 4 Although the general response to technical education and industrial training programmes has shown heartening progress over the last few years, it would be interesting to know what percentage of students aspiring to follow such courses have been guided by the conscious efforts of career masters. I have data from the Industrial Training Board which are based on information provided in a questionnaire included in its recent intake exercise. Of the 8,325 applicants, 46% advanced "better chance to obtain employment" as the reason for pursuing an industrial training course. 20% apparently acted on the advice of their parents

and guardians. Only 19% claimed that they are influenced by their career masters in schools. This is a rather disappointing figure. In addition, only 53% of the selected candidates accepted the offer of a place of study. Among those who declined, some found employment, many preferred to remain in the academic studies, and quite a number chose to loaf around rather than undergo courses such as the construction trade. These statistics indicate the area where improvement is much needed in the vocational guidance work in school.

5 Through constant exhortation and faced by the hard fact of reality, the public attitude towards blue collar jobs has changed considerably over the recent years. While we may have succeeded in putting across to the students the message that opportunities lie in a career in industry, perhaps there is not enough conscious and concerted effort to actually guide them into pursuing one.

6 Whilst the guidance unit and the career masters are doing much good work, I suspect we are only touching the fringes of the tasks before us. We have to review our priorities and pay more attention to the majority of our school-leavers who are not best suited to follow the traditional path to the esteemed vocations and professions. In the past, we have attempted to lay too much emphasis on those careers where guidance is less needed. We have produced, for example, many pamphlets on the glamorous professions which require little or no advertisement on our part, but relatively little has been done in areas of employment which affect the majority of our school-leavers. Although there is a crying need for skilled workers, our students are still striving to get into pre-university classes instead of undertaking skill training in the vocational institutes or enter into apprenticeship schemes. Industry has a great need of skilled and semi-skilled workers. We should provide our school-leavers at the lower levels appropriate guidance and counselling to prepare them to work in the factories and on construction sites where job opportunities are greatest.

7 With the reorganisation of the education system, guidance and counselling service will assume even greater importance and will have to be introduced at an earlier stage of a child's education. At present, such valuable services are not available to those pupils leaving the schools' system after the Primary School Leaving Examination. Under the new system, every child who has completed the primary education, whether in six or in seven years, will be given some form of post primary education and training. It is essential, therefore, that appropriate counselling service should be provided at the primary level. We must ensure that every child will derive maximum benefit from his education and training and that his full potential can be developed to enable him to make his best contribution to the welfare of the society.