

SPEECH BY MR SIA KAH HUI, MINISTER OF STATE FOR
LABOUR, AT THE OPENING OF THE ICFTU/ARO-SNTUC
SEMINAR ON "THE WORKING YOUTH IN ASIA" AT THE
APOLLO HOTEL ON 15 DEC 75 AT 10.00 A.M.

I am glad to have the opportunity to join you all at the opening of this ICFTU/ARO-SNTUC Seminar on "the Working Youth in Asia". We all know that much of Asia is going through the process of urbanization and industrialization, resulting in thousands of young people from outlying areas flowing into the cities and being recruited into factories and other undertakings. The theme for this Seminar is therefore both timely and relevant.

Issues like population control, union education, economic development, unemployment and under-employment are matters which are of great concern to all Asian countries and I hope your pooling of knowledge and experiences would bring about a significant contribution to resolving some of these problems.

However, I believe that your priority must be your concern for employment. Creation of job opportunities is closely tied up with population control. Because of the failure in controlling population growth in Asia and of improper economic planning, large numbers of youth are either unemployed or under-employed. Youths by nature are full of energy and idealism, and if these can be properly harnessed, they would make a significant contribution to the socio-economic growth of our Asian Region.

Population explosion has been a basic contributory factor to the major social and economic problems faced by many of our countries. The need for population planning and control became obvious only during the last decade or so. And unless some drastic measures are taken, the high population growth rates in Asia would nullify all socio-economic planning.

As working youths, you are among the more fortunate people in the region. You have a steady job and a Union to protect your welfare. You should all the more be concerned about the sufferings of your unemployed brethren who do not know where their next meal will come from. Our concern for our unfortunate brethren must lead us to whole-heartedly and sincerely support the family planning as well as economic and social development programmes not only in our own countries but in the Asian region as a whole so as to reduce, if not eradicate, unemployment. It is a truism that mass unemployment and under-employment inevitably weaken the strength and status of the trade union movement. Conversely, a full employment situation strengthens the trade union movement for the supply and demand factor is in the Union's favour.

Urbanization and industrialization are not an unqualified blessing. They have brought with them a set of values, some of which are incompatible with traditional Asian cultural and moral values. There is therefore a danger that Asian youths may be influenced by the decadent Western values. The question of drug-abuse by youths is perhaps an issue you may wish to look into. It is conceivable that working youths may take to drugs in order to seek relief from the monotony of industrial jobs. In this connection, you may wish to examine how unions can assist in combatting this problem. Another dangerous prevailing Western attitude is the misconception that one can increasingly get more pay and better working conditions for less and less work. If this is pursued to the extreme, you can see what the end result will be. The socio-economic realities in Asia just cannot permit this. This tendency however encourages Asian youths to seek "soft" jobs. Thus, this pernicious change of attitude to work must be effectively countered, for sheer hard work is one of the fundamentals that will emancipate Asia from the chains of mass unemployment and slow-rate of socio-economic development.

I hope therefore that you would set your priorities right on the fundamental issues confronting youths in Asia today. May I also take this opportunity to wish our overseas friends a pleasant stay in Singapore. I now have pleasure to declare this ICFU/ARO-SITUC Seminar open.

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