

SPEECH BY THE MINISTER FOR FINANCE, MR HON SUI SEN, AT THE  
OPENING CEREMONY OF THE CIVIL SERVICE STAFF DEVELOPMENT  
INSTITUTE (CSSDI) BUILDING ON 10TH APRIL 1976 AT 11.00 A.M.

The building we are ceremonially opening today is undeniably an impressive one. The Civil Service Staff Development Institute (CSSDI) has come a long way, not only geographically, but also materially from the former Staff Training Institute premises in Lorong Langsir and, if we go further back, from the former Staff Training Centre's even humbler rooms on the mezzanine floor over the General Post Office in Fullerton Building.

Of course, such moves have their dangers. Readers of C. Northcote Parkinson may remember that one of the corollaries of Parkinson's Law is that "a perfection of planned layout is achieved only by institutions on the point of collapse." Parkinson supports this rule by citing numerous examples of organisations which thrived in cramped makeshift quarters and then withered and fell apart in magnificent surroundings like these.

The CSSDI will, however, defy Parkinson's Law, and prove that the excellent facilities provided here enhance, not reduce, its effectiveness. It is essential for the CSSDI to make the best possible use of its facilities and, more to the point, of its human resources. Training and staff development are vitally important to the effectiveness of the Civil Service and hence to the well-being of the nation.

We are now in a period when an ever greater burden will necessarily be put upon the Civil Service. Individual officers must take on greater responsibility, increase their efficiency and productivity, and above all, develop the initiative, flexibility

and common sense without which a Civil Service degenerates into a sterile and counter-productive bureaucracy.

Civil Service officers must, in short, develop themselves. No one can do that for them. No combination of cajolery, threats, fervent appeals to patriotism and sophisticated educational programmes will have much effect on an officer who lacks pride in himself and his work, and who is not interested in improving. Such an officer would be well advised to consider leaving the Service. He will not be happy with the increasingly active role the Service is taking on, and the Service will surely be most unhappy with him.

Many things can be done, however, to aid the great majority of officers - those who do have a sincere desire to participate fully in the work of serving the public, and who want to sharpen and extend their own abilities.

Perhaps the most important thing to be done for these dedicated and ambitious officers is to provide an atmosphere throughout the Civil Service in which their good qualities will be encouraged. Dedication and ambition cannot be injected into an officer, but they can be sustained and nurtured - and they can most certainly be killed. The Civil Service must be an organization in which ability and hard work are recognized and rewarded. Initiative and the willingness to take risks must be seen as essential attributes in the public service, not as the marks of a square peg in a round bureaucratic hole.

The GSSDI has a role to play in the creation and maintenance of this atmosphere; it has a more direct role in helping officers to

develop themselves by enabling them to acquire the tools they need in their work.

These tools range from new quantitative techniques to the basic principles of leadership and supervision, and from the art of clear writing to the science of flow-charting. The Institute has already set up programmes in these and numerous other fields; it will now accelerate and intensify these programmes, demanding even more both of itself and of the trainees who come here.

In all its courses, the Institute must emphasize and exemplify ways of providing efficient and considerate service while at the same time conserving manpower and holding down costs.

Officers in Division I, and in particular members of the Administrative Service, will be seeing a great deal of this building. As the Civil Service takes on more challenges, it is these officers who will feel more strongly the increased demands on their energy, skills and wisdom. In addition to attending formal courses, Administrative Officers will also be using the building as a meeting-place where they will participate in seminars on national goals and policies.

The CSSDI training effort cannot, however, be confined to the upper reaches of the Civil Service, nor to any one service such as the Administrative Service. On the contrary, the CSSDI will make adequate provision for the training needs of officers in Division II, the crucial middle-level managers at whose level the wheels of government either run smoothly or grind to a halt. Even at the Division III level, where specific needs are identified, the CSSDI must be prepared to respond to them.

It must not be thought, however, that the CSSDI is the sole, or even the main, place where training takes place within the Civil Service. The CSSDI is merely one of the places where training is institutionalized. Its activities, combined with the activities of all the other training bodies established by the Government, are insignificant compared to the on-the-job training which takes place whenever a supervisor comes into contact with a subordinate.

The existence of the CSSDI in no way lessens the onus upon all officers in supervisory positions to ensure that their subordinates are trained, and that these subordinates are in turn training those who work under them. This all-important on-the-job training, both in specific job skills and in attitudes toward work and service, must always be thought of as the main Civil Service training activity, to which the CSSDI can offer a complement, never a substitute.

Supervisors thus have a two-fold responsibility with respect to training. On the one hand, they must realize that they themselves are the primary trainers, whose day-to-day advice and example have an immeasurably greater impact than any formal course could ever have. On the other hand, supervisors must familiarize themselves with the training programmes offered by the CSSDI, partly in order to know which courses their subordinates might benefit from, and partly in order to make their own contributions to the CSSDI's work by suggesting ways in which its training might be expanded or improved.

These suggestions are of major importance. The training offered at the CSSDI must by all means be professional, but it

must never become so professional that the CSSDI cuts itself off from the rest of the Civil Service and starts to operate in a self-created world of its own, a world of management systems or linguistic theories in no way related to the workaday world in which most of us operate. This is always a danger for any training institution. I know that those directly involved in the CSSDI's work are aware of this danger and will make every effort to keep the CSSDI's training practical and directly relevant to Civil Service work. But in the long run the best guarantee of the CSSDI's continued usefulness is the active interest and support of the rest of the Service.

There is another way in which senior Civil Servants, particularly Permanent Secretaries and heads of statutory bodies, can make an invaluable contribution to the centralized training offered here. That is, quite simply, by being trainers themselves. They are the true experts on managing in the Singapore Civil Service context, and their willingness to share their insights would add very greatly to the experience of trainees attending the CSSDI courses.

Such senior officers could not, of course, think of taking on any substantial formal training load in addition to their present duties. They could, however, come to the CSSDI for occasional informal sessions, perhaps to explain and comment on their work before a group of newly-recruited Division I officers. The inductees would undoubtedly gain a great deal, and for their part the senior officers might also enjoy and benefit from the give and take of a question-and-answer session with junior officers who are not directly under them.

Occasional informal sessions could perhaps also with advantage be held with interested Ministers, Ministers of State, Parliamentary Secretaries and Members of Parliament, particularly those on the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee who have been most articulate in Parliament over the virtues and shortcomings of the Civil Service.

We would all be involved, then, in helping the CSSDI to overturn Parkinson. We must all aid in proving that it is possible to move into a splendid new building with the happiest consequences. It is right that we should all be involved, for the CSSDI exists for the benefit of the entire public service. This is not so much the CSSDI's building as the building of the Civil Service as a whole.

It is now my great pleasure to declare the Civil Service Staff Development Institute Building open, and to wish the Institute every success in its work.