

13-2/11-2/82/08/21

SPEECH BY PROF S JAYAKUMAR, MINISTER OF STATE (LAW AND HOME AFFAIRS), AT THE OFFICIAL OPENING OF "CAREER OPPORTUNITIES FOR WOMEN IN THE 80'S" ORGANISED BY SINGAPORE JAYCEES, ORCHID CHAPTER, AT FRENCH ROOM, HOTEL EQUATORIAL, ON SATURDAY, 21 AUGUST 1982 AT 9.30 AM

I am pleased to officiate at the opening of your seminar on "Career Opportunities for Women in the 80's".

The participants will be discussing topics and issues which concern women's participation in the work force. I am told that the objective of the seminar is to stimulate the entrepreneurial spirit of women and to encourage them to advance in their careers.

The question of women working in Singapore is not of concern to women only. It has a bearing on our economy, and therefore concerns all Singaporeans.

The 1980 Census of Population of Singapore contains certain data which you will find to be of interest:

- (a) Over the 10-year period 1970-1980 the number of women who joined the labour force grew much faster than for males. Female labour force more than doubled from 187,453 in 1970 to 385,352 in 1980, compared to male labour force rising by only 35.5 per cent.
- (b) The tendency to remain economically inactive or withdraw from the labour force after marriage was less prevalent in 1980 than in 1970.
- (c) As expected, there were more single than married women in the labour force. This is to be expected due to lesser economic necessity for married women to work and because of other constraints like household duties, looking after young children, etc.

(d) However, increasing ...2/-

- (d) However, increasing numbers of married women are beginning to work. In 1980 married women comprised 35 per cent of the female labour force, compared with 26 per cent in 1970.
- (e) As regards age groups, participation rates of females aged 25 to 29 and those aged 30 to 39 almost doubled the 1970 figures. What does this mean? This dramatic rise in female specific participation rates reflected the progress in women's education during the last two decades, as well as the rising age of marriage.

These are healthy signs. It reflects first our successful educational system and secondly old-fashioned concepts that women should not work are gradually eroding to more realistic and pragmatic attitudes. It is education, however, that is the key. Compared with a decade ago, the number of literate females increased by 63.5 per cent whilst the number of literate males increased by only 39 per cent: this can be attributed to more females availing themselves of the expanding educational facilities. Indeed, during the past decade female enrolment in secondary schools increased by about 26 per cent which was more than double that for males. In the university, (1981-82 session) 46.6 per cent of the students were females. In the law faculty 55.1 per cent were females.

While we can take satisfaction at these trends of working women, the 1980 census showed that there is far more scope for women to work. Of those who are economically inactive, more than two-thirds were females. Of these the majority (63 per cent) were home-houseworkers whilst students constituted more than a quarter with the remaining females retired or elderly.

Of the economically inactive women who are home-houseworkers,

- 3,414 (0.9 per cent) - have tertiary education
- 6,472 (1.7 per cent) - have upper secondary education
- 16,701 (4.4 per cent) - have secondary education.

In other words, seven per cent of the home-houseworkers who are economically inactive have secondary education or better and certainly can contribute in our efforts to get skilled workers, with basic literacy and numeracy skills.

With our efforts to improve productivity, our efforts to climb up the technological ladder, with the phasing out of foreign workers from non-traditional sources by 1984: alternative sources of labour must be found to fill the vacancies left and to relieve the tight labour market.

From the figures I have given, it is clear that our female population still constitutes a rich source of labour which can be further tapped. Studies by the Ministry of Labour show that our female workers tend to stop work after marriage. Unlike trends in US, Denmark, Japan and South Korea, our female workers do not re-enter the labour force after their children have grown up.

It is understandable that married women will be concerned about the time and care they need to devote to the family, especially young children. This is a legitimate concern.

Indeed, one can ask whether the goal of promoting a cohesive, closely-knit family is in any way inconsistent with the goal of getting more women to work?

If the figures are any indication, they seem to indicate women can play dual roles - as mother, wife as well as breadwinner.

There must be inducements for employed married women to continue working and for the economically inactive women to start working, without them feeling that they are neglecting the upbringing of their children.

In particular, if companies can offer part-time work with shorter working hours and flexible working arrangements, more women will be attracted to join the labour force. Likewise, there is a need for suitable child-care arrangements such as the example of Chartered Industries which set up a company creche for its workers' children.

Part-time work means one does not have to stop working completely. If one did not work at all, say five to six years, then one will be more inhibited and find it more difficult to start work later, to adjust to working environment, to be familiar

with new .....4/-

with new technology etc. Part-time work overcomes this problem. One will still be working, although for shorter hours. It will be easier for such a person to change to full-time employment.

Organisations like yours, the Singapore Jaycees, should publicise the need for women to work, especially the concept of part-time work.

---