

PRESS RELEASE

Information Division, Ministry of Culture, City Hall, Singapore 0617 - TEL: 3378191 ext. 352, 353, 354 / 3362207 / 3362271

09-2/82/10/26.

SPEECH BY MR S DHANABALAN, MINISTER FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND
MINISTER FOR CULTURE, AT THE PRODUCTIVITY SEMINAR FOR
MASS MEDIA PERSONNEL AT SHANGRI-LA HOTEL ON 26 OCTOBER '82 AT 9.30 AM

The Productivity Movement has entered its second year. All of us involved in the Movement, the National Productivity Council, the National Productivity Board, the unions and employers have much to reflect upon. Higher productivity is the core of our economic restructuring exercise. Economic restructuring means making our economy more efficient and more competitive. It is only with higher productivity consciousness among our managers, supervisors and the workforce can we produce high technology products and services of a quality, price and delivery that will keep us ahead of the competition.

Higher productivity requires a combination of many factors. It requires such factors as good management, trained and adaptable labour and the right equipment. Thus it should not be surprising that so much emphasis is laid upon learning and applying new management techniques in training labour to acquire new skills and in improving equipment or finding better equipment to do the job. But important as all these factors are, the most important factor, the factor that binds or cements all the other factors together to achieve higher productivity, is the right mental or psychological framework within which the people is an enterprise work. Whether the people belong to top management, middle management or are workers on the shop floor, they must have a sense of shared purpose, an understanding of the identity of interests, a sense of common destiny, a strong conviction that though they have different roles and functions, they are welded together in a common enterprise in whose fruits they will share equitably. I shall call this mental attitude the binding factor. Without this binding factor, all the other factors will never yield the maximum results. New equipment, new procedures, imparting of new skills to the workers may all increase the productivity in a company, but never to the level

possible without /2.

possible without the binding factor. If this binding factor is present, management will look upon labour as more than a mere factor of production and workers will consider that they are more than selling their labour for eight hours a day. Management will not look upon workers as so many Pavlov's dogs who must be activated to perform nor will workers look upon management as an adversary to outwit. Rather, management will look upon workers as partners who are not merely expected to do what they are told to do but to contribute actively to the improvement of the company's performance. Similarly workers will closely identify the well-being and performance of the company with their own well-being and security. A worker who goes beyond the limits of his duties will not be considered as a busybody by the management or as a dangerous pace setter by fellow workers.

The better companies in USA and Europe have this strong binding factor and so do many companies in Japan. The sense of identity of interest is very pronounced.

I have been told by some people that the outstanding performance of the Japanese companies is due to a strong sense of nationalism. I am told, it is impossible for the workers in Singapore to have this strong feeling of shared purpose because the ownership and management of most of our companies is foreign. This argument does not stand up to even cursory scrutiny. Ownership by nationals is no guarantee that there will be a strong identity of interest leading to higher productivity. If this were so, that is if ownership by nationals results in high productivity, then companies owned by Singaporeans or by the Singapore government should have the most strongly productivity motivated workers. This is simply not the case. If ownership by nationals is the determinant, how do we explain why so many companies in USA and Europe owned by their own nationals are fighting for survival against Japanese companies because their productivity cannot match that of the Japanese companies? How do we explain how a Japanese company which bought an American-owned TV factory in USA was able to achieve higher productivity with the same American workers? The proposition does not obviously hold.

Whether or not the binding factor that is crucial for higher productivity is present in an enterprise depends not on national ownership but primarily on the quality of the management. I dare say that in nine times out of ten where the binding factor is absent, it

is the fault of the management rather than workers or unions.

Of course, the line between management and labour is not always absolutely distinct. A supervisor is part of the management to the workers below him, while the supervisor considers himself a worker under his immediate superior. The effort to build up the binding factor can be scuttled by anyone at any level of management. But it is the philosophy and the actions at the very top levels of management that will determine whether or not the binding factor is built up in an enterprise.

I have dwelt at some length on the importance of the binding factor to make it clear that the process of educating our society to strive towards higher productivity is more complex than imparting new skills and knowledge to our workers and management personnel. It involves educating them to adopt a new mental and emotional attitude in their relationship with each other and as intertwined parts of an enterprise.

This is a long-term educational process whose foundations will ideally have to be laid early in life and reinforced and built up through the entire life of a person. It is a process that cannot be left to the schools. The influence of society and the mass media in the shaping of the right attitudes and values for higher productivity is even more decisive than what is taught in the schools.

The vital role of the media in the productivity promotion process has been recognised by the Committee on Productivity (COP) set up last year to map out a comprehensive programme for the productivity movement. The Media Consultative Committee, as recommended by the COP, has been actively involved in assisting the NPB to formulate awareness to the general public. The mass media has given strong support but much more can be done.

The media has two roles to play. The first and relatively simpler role is to persuade people to learn new skills and acquire new knowledge and to impart such new skills and knowledge. The second and more difficult task is to educate both management and workers to understand and practise those qualities that go to strengthen what I have called the binding factor.

Promoting productivity involves changing attitudes and creating widespread awareness of the need for increased productivity and the factors that contribute towards increased productivity. These have to be explained in simple and effective terms through the printed word, through radio and through television. Only through such means can we spread the message to every adult and child in Singapore.

#####