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SPEECH BY DR WAN SOON BEE, MINISTER OF STATE (PRIME MINISTER'S OFFICE) AND DEPUTY SECRETARY-GENERAL, NTUC AT THE BURSARY AWARDS PRESENTATION CEREMONY OF THE UNION OF TELECOMS EMPLOYEES OF SINGAPORE (UTES) AT THE MANDARIN HOTEL ON SATURDAY, 1 JUNE 1985 AT 10.00 AM

I am indeed pleased to be here again to present the bursary awards to children of UTES' members. Last year, UTES granted a total of 56 awards amounting to approximately \$10,000. This year, the Union has in addition to the bursary awards, provided for additional book grants for the needed cases. This decision by the Union to provide such benefits to its members is a sign of the Union's positive move towards providing more immediate and tangible benefits to its members.

At the last Triennial Delegates' Conference of the NTUC in April, trade union leaders were concerned with the declining membership and decided that immediate steps must be taken to reverse the situation. During the conference many views were expressed and many suggestions were made.

The delegates firmly believed that a strong and credible trade union movement is not only beneficial to the union members and workers but also to the nation as a whole. Trade union movement in Singapore has played a crucial role in the economic development of our country. And the workers have benefitted from a better standard of living. It is unfortunate that with full employment situation and increasing affluence, Singaporeans have become complacent. They have forgotten what has made Singapore tick. Perhaps they should ask themselves why Singaporeans living in a small island without any natural resources are able to enjoy such a high standard of living and millions of others in bigger countries are living in extreme poverty. Our success has not come about by

accident. It is the end result of a combined effort put in by the Government, the trade union and the people. The trade union movement can proudly claim to have contributed to our country's success.

In order for the trade union movement to be credible and effective, it must have the support of the workers. The workers, members and non-members, bargainable and non-bargainable will be the losers if the trade union movement is allowed to decline to the extent that it is unable to perform its functions properly. It is of utmost importance that we find ways and means to encourage and to convince more workers to come out and support the trade union movement.

Some of the causes of the declining membership problems identified by the delegates during the Conference are:

- (1) The trade union movement has concentrated too much on national issues and has in a way neglected the specific problems faced by the unions and the union members.
- (2) Non-union members are enjoying the same benefits as the union members.
- (3) Lack of awareness on the role played by the trade union movement.
- (4) Not enough efforts have been put in to recruit new members.
- (5) Unco-operative attitudes of the employers.

It has been decided that in order to reverse the trend of declining membership we must first of all strengthen our organising set up at all levels. Secondly workers must be made to realise the important role played by the trade union movement. Thirdly we must seek better benefits for the union members only both from the employers and our co-operatives. Fourthly we must



re-examine the activities and welfare benefits provided by the unions. Some of these activities and welfare benefits may not be relevant and attractive in today's situation. For example traditional benefits such as retirement benefits should be re-examined. These benefits are no longer attractive to the younger workforce. This is because the retirement benefit of a few hundred dollars offered by the Union will be insignificant compared with the large sum of their CPP contributions accumulated over the years. And young workers certainly are not attracted by the ideas of waiting for 30 to 35 years to receive the few hundred dollars. With a workforce that is more educated, sophisticated and affluent, the Union must also tailor their activities and benefits to satisfy the increasing demands by its members both in quantity and in quality.

I am glad to know that Telecoms management has made a generous contribution of \$500,000 last December towards the UTES Welfare Benefit Scheme. This will enable UTES to offer more attractive welfare benefit schemes to its members. This positive move by Telecoms management will go a long way in helping to forge a close relationship between the union and the management. UTES and its members must reciprocate by working with the management to make Telecoms successful. By providing benefits such as bursary or scholarship award, the Union is helping the members' children who are deserving, to succeed in life. At the same time it is also helping the society to develop our human resources to its maximum potentials.

In conclusion, I would like once again to congratulate UTES for their generous and positive move towards providing more welfare benefits for its members. I would like also to congratulate the boys and girls who have won the awards. For those who did not receive the awards, do not be discouraged and continue to strive for better results. #####