

SINGAPORE GOVERNMENT PRESS STATEMENT

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TEXT OF SPEECH BY THE MINISTER FOR LABOUR, MR. JEK YEUN THONG, AT THE CLOSING SESSION OF THE PUBLIC SERVICES INTERNATIONAL ASIAN SEMINAR AT SINGAPORE POLYTECHNIC ON MAY 27TH, 1964 AT 2.30 P.M.

I have great pleasure to be here with you at this closing session of the Public Services International's First Asian Seminar which is indeed a most significant occasion.

Trade unions in Singapore began to establish official ties, through affiliation, with international trade union organisations only some 10 years ago. It is a happy coincidence that the first international trade secretariat, which has had an affiliate in Singapore, has been the P.S.I. I refer to the former City Council Services Union's affiliation to the P.S.I. which was then known as the International Federation of Unions of Employees in Public & Civil Services.

In recent years, more and more local trade unions have extended their activities into the international field. Today, some of our unions are affiliated to international trade union organisations such as -

- (1) The International Federation of Petroleum Workers;
- (2) The World Federation of Organisations of the Teaching Profession;
- (3) The International Federation of Airline Pilots Association;
- (4) The Officers Merchant Navy Federation;
- (5) The Postal, Telegraph & Telephone International; and
- (6) The International Transport Workers Federation.

The healthy and vigorous growth of our trade union movement in recent times has in its wake brought about closer ties with international trade union bodies. This is by no means surprising, for it is natural for progressive trade unionism to look further afield in the establishment of fraternal relations with workers in other countries. Recently, the trade union movement in Singapore under the auspices of the National Trades Union Congress has established and cemented fraternal relations with trade union movements in Afro-Asian countries. These trends manifest the determined efforts made by the trade union movement in Singapore in the cause of international trade union solidarity.

It is interesting to note also that recent years have seen an increasing number of our trade union leaders going overseas for seminar and training courses. We are naturally most grateful to those friendly countries and international trade union organisations for the training facilities which they have provided for our trade unionists. I have no doubt that, with increasing contacts between our trade union movement and overseas trade union movements, an increasing two-way traffic of trade unionists will flow for the enrichment of the trade union movement in general.

I need not stress here that trade unions are created by workers for themselves. They have, therefore, to be so organised that the workers themselves control them and are collectively responsible for the acts of the union. This is the true democratic process and the success of this process depends not only on courageous and effective leadership but also on a well-informed and disciplined rank and file. Leadership must of necessity be vested in the hands of a few, for not every trade unionist is a born leader. The leadership of the trade union movement has a special responsibility; its task is to effectively lead the rank and file to practise and implement democracy within the workshop and within the union. I suggest that an important step in the effective guidance of the rank and file is the need to free them from the shackles of poor education, illiteracy and lack of social vision. A reasonably educated and literate rank and file with the resultant wealth of social vision will contribute to the growth of sound democratic trade unionism which in turn will benefit not only the workers themselves but the general public at large.

In this connection, may I say that the development of education and research in the trade union field in Singapore is vitally important and every possible assistance has to be given to achieve this end. The Government has already made a start to assist the trade union movement in this field by the establishment of the Labour Research Unit which is solely financed by the Government but whose general policy direction and staffing are governed by the trade unions themselves under the auspices of the National Trades Union Congress. In this particular context, it is gratifying to note that the P.S.I. has brought its training facilities right into our home by organising this first Asian Seminar - the first of its kind ever organised by an international trade secretariat in Singapore. I am sure that this Seminar will stimulate the development of trade union research and education in Singapore and the interest of international union organisations in efforts that are being made in this part of the world in the field of trade union research and education.

The overseas participants of this Seminar have had in the past few days the opportunity to study at first hand our trade union organisation and structure and our industrial relations system. I hope that before they leave for home they will take the opportunity to observe the determined efforts being made by the Government to achieve economic and social progress, if they have not already done so. From the wreckage of the past we are building anew in the present so that the future can be more beneficial to our people. The road to the future may, however, not be easy but nothing worthwhile can be achieved without a little sacrifice and determined effort.

I am sure that your studies and discussions at this Seminar will prove most profitable in the enhancement of the role that workers in the Public Services have to play both as trade unionists and servants of the people.

I am now pleased to declare the Seminar closed.

MAY 27th, 1964.

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