

Speech of Mr. Yong Nyuk Lin, Minister for Health
at the King Edward VII Hall of Residence,
University of Singapore, on Thursday 8th October,
1964, at 1945 hours

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LET'S INSPIRE MORE PEOPLE TO SACRIFICE
TIME AND EFFORT FOR COMMON GOOD

I welcome this opportunity of addressing you for a number of reasons. When last I was here, 6 years ago, it was under different circumstances. I was then on the University Council and also Chairman of its Finance Committee. Singapore was then a British Colony and anti-colonialism was then much in vogue.

Tonight, although I am no longer associated with the University Council, I do try to keep myself abreast by reading the minutes of its monthly meetings. My interest in you and in your welfare are also much wider in scope now. Not only your activities (academic as well as extramural) are my concern X X X but more so, when you do graduate. Then again, we have already achieved our independence through Malaysia. Anti-colonialism has been a dead horse for more than a year, but alas, there are certain Rip-Van-Winkles who profess to be very "progressive" in their thinking are, however, still flogging this dead horse! For a change, now and again, they would shout and gesticulate against "Neo-colonialism"! I confess that I am seriously thinking whether or not it is my public duty to place the facilities of Woodbridge Hospital at their disposal and even perhaps set aside a few wards for the accommodation of these misguided political zealots with their dangerous hallucinations!

Now, that we are a free and independent people - What are we going to do with our freedom? Surely, the future is ours to fashion. We want ideas and suggestions - constructive ideas and suggestions to help build up our country, our nation, to make it a better world to live in. It should be our aim to raise the living standards of our people, to reduce the disparate gap between the haves and the have-nots. To provide more opportunities for employment and thus reduce our large number of unemployed.

To increase productivity and thus to increase prosperity all round. To ensure equal opportunity for education so that no student need be deprived of education on economic grounds. To provide better housing, better social services and so on.

All these desirable objectives will not, however, come to pass through mere talk and slogan-shouting, but through honest hard work, both physical labour and mental energy from everyone, workers, citizens and leaders of our people. There must also be discipline from our people, how not to fritter away wealth in selfish, wasteful consumption for immediate enjoyment but to conserve as much as possible of our wealth and resources for re-investment in the community for future betterment of all.

Yes, we must appreciate the necessity for everyone to make some contribution towards the betterment of society of which he is a part thereof. Our society only progresses by as much as what we put in, is more than what we take out of it. It will be a sad day, indeed, if more people are only interested in what they can take out of a system without contributing anything towards it. Such selfish one-way traffic must ultimately lead to chaos and bankruptcy. But if we can instil the nobler spirit of sacrifice into our people, to be able to give more than what they can take away, then I say, we have good hopes of achieving our Utopia in much quicker time. That is why I have chosen my theme for tonight to be "Let's inspire more people to sacrifice time and effort for common good".

Why this theme? In every age and in every group, there will always be Angry Young Men and Angry Young Women. King Edward VII Hall of Residence is no exception! Why do I say so? Well, I found this
----- KE Newsletter Supplement dated 8th September with my newspapers one morning. How it got there, I need not ask. X X X I can, however, say that the Newsletter is decently stencilled, unlike so many badly stencilled newsheets which go under the category of "subversive literature".

In this newsletter, I noted that you, Mr. President, and your Committee called for "Action" against the University Council's veto of your Hall's intention to air-condition the Music Lounge.

I understand that such proposal, if approved, would involve a capital expenditure of \$4,000 and an annual recurrent expenditure of \$3,000 per annum. You feel, however, that as your Hall's financial position is strong, (which indeed it is, with Reserves, shrewdly invested in Shares and Fixed Deposits costing \$186,000 but worth \$270,000 today after allowing for the recent drastic fall in the prices of Stocks and Shares at our local Stock Exchange) that you should be able to proceed with your air-conditioning. In true democratic style, your Committee decided to hold a Referendum. You indicated that you would stage a one-meal strike against the Council's decision should the referendum be carried by 80% of the residents. I believe the Referendum was duly held but the result is, I understand, a secret. As we have not heard about the threatened one-meal strike, which is just as well, it will not be presumptuous on my part to assume that you did get a thumping majority - but perhaps failed to achieve the target of 80%? If it is any consolation at all, may I offer you and your Committee some advice? Should you have occasion to hold another Referendum next time - don't follow de Gaulle as a precedent, rather the PAP style - for guaranteed success - you get what you want - you achieve what you aim to do! X X X

I am not unsympathetic as to how you all feel over this issue. I concede that all the sound and fury in King Edward VII Hall in recent months was a genuine expression of your deep sense of frustration. Having been a student once, and a hostelite in Bukit Timah, and quite an AYM in my time, I do ask you not to think of your problem in isolation. I do ask of you to judge this issue in wider perspective, against the background of the University and its finances, as a whole. Please remember, that with naked Indonesian aggression against our new found independence, limited public funds which previously could be channelled towards providing better and yet more social services (which include education) will now be even more limited because large sums must be diverted towards heavy cost of defence, to preserve our national honour, our territorial integrity and survival. It must not be forgotten also, that our autonomous

University of Singapore is unfortunately not autonomous in one important aspect, namely, finance. Our University, in fact, is almost wholly subsidised by Government grants each year. I do not deny that our University has received many generous private endowments in the past and will, I am sure, continue to be the recipient of yet more generous private donations in the future, but our University is certainly not in the same happy position like many older universities in U.K. and U.S.A. which are in strong financial position even to this day, because of extremely generous donations by philanthropists who found it extremely difficult to give away their large personal fortunes, however hard they tried.

So you see, our University authorities are in the unenviable and difficult position of having on the one hand, to meet with incessant public pressure for a higher and yet higher intake of students each year but with little prospect of a corresponding increase to the annual grant from Government on the other! In my opinion, I shall consider myself lucky if my colleague, the Minister for Finance will allow me even a standstill budget for 1965! No one will deny that air-conditioning is a desirable thing in itself, but because of limitation of finance and competing needs, those responsible for execution of policies have to determine priorities and therefore not everything, however desirable, in principle, can be met. When it costs the University something like \$125,000 per annum for the running cost and maintenance of its air-conditioning units alone, the Finance Committee is absolutely correct in placing the onus of responsibility on its Chief Executive Officer, namely the Vice-Chancellor, to vet every request for air-conditioning of University property. Hence your frustration!

However, let me now quote you an interesting news item from a recent issue of the independent London Observer, dated 4th October, 1964. Heading - "Hospitals - Operating theatres like slums":-

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" Operating theatres cost from £25,000 a time and a suite of three with full air-conditioning a minimum of £120,000. Only 387 operating theatres have been built or converted in England and Wales since 1949; there are 2,800 hospitals.

New theatres are no use without more staff: two were idle at Ashton-under-Lyne in August when a woman patient died from gangrene after an operation in the old theatre.

Infections can come from insufficient cleaning, from air drawn in through internal ventilation, from germs carried by doctors and nurses. Humidity makes matters worse. Air-conditioning is the answer, but the Ministry of Health rarely sanctions it."

So you can see that in U.K. air-conditioning even for surgical theatres is regarded as low in priority. But in Singapore, I am glad to say, both our Ministry and the Planning Unit regard air-conditioning for all surgeries as essential and therefore all our operating theatres are air-conditioned. Should we become more prosperous in time, Government grants could perhaps increase and we may then reach the happy position to be able to afford air-conditioning in all public rooms, including Music Lounges. But for the present, the policy of restricting air-conditioning to certain selected buildings like surgeries, libraries, certain offices, lecture rooms and laboratories, should be regarded as reasonable.

You may still insist, however, that as your Hall has Reserves with assets worth \$270,000 and your Hall is run on a self-sufficient basis, why should you not be allowed to spend a few thousand dollars for air-conditioned comfort? To this, I would pose a question. Suppose you deny yourself this air-conditioning comfort, but let this sacrifice egg you on towards building something more permanent? Have you ever considered the possibility of pooling your Reserves and resources together with that of Raffles, Eusoff and Dunearn and of converting it into (say) a \$½ million new Hall of Residence to be built solely through the efforts of students in residence themselves? What about it? Isn't this a worthwhile project to work for? X X X

You already have a proud record of voluntary service for public welfare. Your annual Welfare Week for charities is an outstanding effort. You have built kampong roads starting with

Lorong 23 in Geylang West, which is my constituency, and for which I shall always be indebted to you. X X X You also send more than 300 blood donors to fill our Blood Bank each year. Although only 6 managed to win prizes from the Lucky Draw, I think you will have better luck next year! During the deplorable July disturbances, this Hall gave sanctuary to a number of refugees and a fair number of you also volunteered for service at our Casualty Unit, for all these, I want to place on record my deepest appreciation and gratitude to you for your excellent display of public spiritedness.

I have no hesitation in saying, that you have proved in so many ways that you are worthy sons and daughters of Malaysia! At this time of Emergency, let us resolve to place national interest above everything else. When your Newsletter makes further appeals entitled "Time for Action" and we can anticipate quite a number of appeals in view of the Emergency, I am confident that you will rise to the occasion time and time again, and by your stirring examples to inspire yet more people to sacrifice time and effort for the common good of Malaysia!