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SINGAPORE GOVERNMENT PRESS STATEMENT

SPEECH BY MR. E.W. BARKER, MINISTER FOR LAW AT
THE SINGAPORE POLYTECHNIC 1967 GRADUATION CEREMONY
AT THE SINGAPORE CONFERENCE HALL ON 26TH
AUGUST, 1967 AT 10 A.M.

May I first take this opportunity to extend, to those of you who are graduating today, my warmest congratulations and best wishes for the future. And may I add, that the future is indeed bright for you, for with the increasing tempo of development which is taking place in our republic, opportunities for those with proven ability are indeed considerable.

Higher education in Singapore, has in the last 10 years or so, undergone significant changes. Not only is it no longer the preserve of the privileged few, having been thrown open to all who have the ability and perseverance to undergo it; but, equally important, the content has also been changed to bring it more in line with the changing needs of our society. Consequently, more emphasis is being given to the study of science and allied subjects than in the past. This is an important step in the right direction, for in the modern world, the technocrat has come into his own. Not only is he needed for the growing number of jobs that call for his special skills but, in more and more cases, he is also needed for many responsible jobs which require both specialised technical as well as administrative skills.

With the growing importance of technology in our modern age, more and more emphasis is being placed on the study of science and technology in our society. The imbalance of a lop-sided educational curriculum inherited from the past has now been corrected. In order to progress and thrust itself forward, a society needs not only able administrators, but equally important, it needs technologists, people trained in their special fields, who will be able to make important contributions in industry, business and commerce.

Therefore, if we in Singapore are to develop our industrial base efficiently, more and more technocrats will be needed. It is therefore particularly gratifying to see the increasing numbers of our young men and women emerging and embarking on careers in the commercial, industrial and maritime fields. The old attitude which encouraged students to seek out a university education in the liberal arts followed by a job in the civil service is steadily being replaced by an increasing preference for the wide range of satisfying jobs that can be found in the business, industrial and maritime sectors.

The Singapore Polytechnic has come a long way since it was officially set up in 1959. Through the dedication and untiring efforts of its staff, both past and present, the institution has built up for itself a reputation which is second to none in this part of the world. Today the Polytechnic in conjunction with the University of Singapore, also offers degree courses in Architecture, Accountancy and Engineering.

I am sure, however, that the staff does not intend to rest on their laurels but will continue not only to gain wider recognition for the Polytechnic but also to expand the range of courses available in order to provide the necessary brain-power for an ever increasing range of industries in Singapore. The creation earlier this year of a course in rubber and plastics technology by the Polytechnic is therefore a step in the right direction.

All this of course, augurs well for the future of the Polytechnic, but it must be remembered that the fine reputation which has been so painstakingly built up over the years, has to be maintained not only by the staff, but also by its students, and, this is perhaps the acid test. For if those who emerge from this institution do not show the skill, dedication and drive expected of them, then the hard work put in by others will have been to no avail.

The attainment of professional or academic qualifications are all too often equated to mean an automatic pass-key to an easy life in society or to rapid advancement in one's job. Nothing can be further from the truth. The basic training you have acquired is not the be-all and end-all of your education. Rather it marks the beginning of the next stage of a life-long process of learning.

The knowledge you have acquired will enable you to apply disciplined thinking in your work and should spur you on to delve deeper in your chosen fields of interests. It is only by perseverance and hard work that you will be able to better yourselves professionally and be an asset to society.

The stability and prosperity of our Republic depends upon the efforts of each and every one of us. This must be stressed because in the end, we will all share a common prosperity or a common poverty. Never take the future for granted, for it is what we make of it. If our Republic has a continuing supply of dedicated and well-trained young people with the capacity to lead and the skill to harness the energies of our people, I have no doubt that we can build an even more prosperous and dynamic society.