

SINGAPORE GOVERNMENT PRESS STATEMENT

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TEXT OF SPEECH BY THE MINISTER FOR EDUCATION, MR. ONG PANG BOON, AT THE TEACHERS' DAY RALLY HELD IN THE CHINESE CHAMBER OF COMMERCE AUDITORIUM ON SATURDAY, JUNE 1, AT 9.30 A.M.

Once again we are gathered here to celebrate Teachers' Day, a day set aside for students to remember the debt of gratitude they owe to their teachers, and for the teachers themselves to renew their dedication to the heavy responsibilities of their profession.

In reviewing your professional activities over the past year, you will no doubt find many achievements of which you have reason to be proud; there will also be other areas in which progress has been barely satisfactory, and quite a few where improvement is obviously needed. Among the successes, we might include the progress made in wider and keener participation in all forms of extra-curricular activity. Here, the Tiong Bahru Integrated Secondary School's recent expedition to scale Mount Kinabalu was a shining example of initiative and pioneering spirit. There has also been a noticeable increase in the number of teachers taking up community service of one kind or another, thus forging a valuable link between the school and adult society. Some of the older students have been called up for part-time national service, and this intermingling of mature students from different language streams undergoing rigorous training in the national cause presents a new form of integration which must be beneficial to everyone concerned. By such means, the problems of the school and of education generally are brought home to the man in the street, and the harsh realities of life and of problems on a national scale are brought back to the classroom. All this is to the good.

At the other end of the scale, there have been some major disappointments. I shall mention only two. The first concerns the teaching of the second language, particularly the teaching of Chinese in English schools. Here, the results have fallen far short of expectations. It would not be fair to put the blame entirely on the second language teachers, for a great deal of the direction, the drive, necessary for successful second language teaching depends on the principal of the school. By this I do not mean that the principal should bully his second language teachers into greater effort. What I mean is that the ultimate success or failure of our second language policy depends on whether we have the whole-hearted co-operation of the principals, on whether they are prepared to take a personal interest in this matter. Admittedly, there are other factors which may account for our singular lack of progress in this direction. Unlike English, which has been the second language of Chinese, Malay and Tamil schools

for a very long time, Chinese as a second language in English schools is a comparatively recent innovation. Moreover, whilst the teaching of English as a second language has been the subject of research resulting in the development of special methods and techniques of teaching, the teaching of Chinese as a second language is a subject we know very little about. Another contributory factor may be that English is not only an official language, it is also the language of administration, of commerce and science, and of international communication; most of the children in English schools therefore find little or no incentive to learn Chinese and those who do study it seriously find little opportunity to use it in a practical situation. One way to remedy this situation, as I have explained in Parliament, is to use Chinese and the other second languages as media of instruction in certain subjects, just as we have begun to use English to teach mathematics and science in Chinese, Malay and Tamil schools. For a more fundamental solution, we hope to undertake a thorough research into the problem of teaching Chinese to Chinese children as a second language and to find ways and means of training teachers specially for this job. Meanwhile, I am sure some improvement can be made if principals and teachers redouble their efforts and give the subject its due priority.

The second matter which has been a source of anxiety is the increase in the number of disciplinary cases affecting teachers and principals of schools in recent times. With a teaching force of over 19,000 members, I suppose it is inevitable that there would be a few black sheep. But what is disturbing is that the subjects of disciplinary action are not young teachers, but senior members of the service. Let me say quite categorically that teachers, like politicians, are expected to be above reproach in their public as well as their private lives. Unlike members of some other professions, the teacher cannot say: "My private life is my own affair so long as I perform my official duties satisfactorily." This is because the teacher teaches by precept and example; his standards of morality, of what is good and what is bad, become those of his students. Those of us who are unable to satisfy this requirement should not have chosen the teaching profession in the first instance. Having chosen it, they must abide by its code of conduct or pay the penalty.

Turning to the future, I am afraid I cannot paint too rosy a picture. The costs of building up a defence capability and the economic effects of the accelerated run-down of the British bases will call for greater effort and personal sacrifices from us all. Therefore, any general upward revision of salaries for teachers and for that matter,

the whole civil service3/-

the whole civil service, is out of the question. Meanwhile, an honest wage for an honest day's work must be the order of the day. Targets that we have set ourselves in education in the next few years will also have a direct bearing on teachers. Our first and most urgent target is to divert a greater number of our secondary school population to technical and vocational education. This will mean a corresponding decrease in the number of students and teachers in the academic stream. As many of the academic teachers as have the necessary qualifications and aptitude will be given an opportunity to qualify as technical or vocational teachers and instructors. However, clearly not all redundant teachers in the academic schools can be retrained for the technical schools. At the same time, our other target of striving for quality in all aspects of education will mean that some teachers in both the technical and the academic schools may have to undergo retraining to make them better teachers. The numbers involved may be quite large and the measures to be taken in respect of redundant teachers may be quite drastic.

I am sorry to sound so pessimistic on this day of all days, but I think it is better for all concerned to be forewarned than to be taken by surprise. Let us hope that things will not be as bad as I have made them out to be. Certainly, I can assure you that drastic measures will be taken only in the last resort. On that more cheerful note, may I thank you for inviting me to this function and to wish you a happy Teachers' Day.

JUNE 1, 1968.

(Time issued: 0930 hours)
