

TEXT OF SPEECH BY THE MINISTER FOR EDUCATION, MR. LIM
KHAN SAI, AT THE 20TH ANNIVERSARY DINNER AND DANCE OF
THE SINGAPORE TEACHERS' UNION, AT THE GOLDEN LOTUS
RESTAURANT, HOTEL MALAYSIA, ON SAT., NOV. 14, AT 8 P.M.

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I am sure most of you must have followed with great interest the public discussions over the last few months about teachers' working conditions and the state of the schools. Some teachers have left the service claiming that they were willing to take lower-paid jobs in order to escape the unbearable working conditions. Directly and indirectly, the Ministry of Education has always been blamed for these resignations and the discontent of those who remain.

But have working conditions for teachers really deteriorated so much? The traditional duties of the teacher are still the same - teaching, disciplining, preparing lessons after school, marking piles of exercise books and answer scripts, supervising extra-curricular activities. What may have made life more difficult for the teachers are the intensive expansion of the extra-curricular programme and the tendency of other Ministries to regard the teaching service as a convenient resource centre for various national campaigns. It is my intention to review the various activities in which the schools are engaged and to put them in their right perspective and order of priority. We must not lose sight of our cardinal aim which is to educate the young.

Those who leave the teaching profession do so for better prospects - if not for an immediate rise in pay. It is not that working conditions have become that much worse, but that opportunities in other fields have become that much better. And this is the price we have to pay for the success of our industrialisation programme.

One of the grounds that I have heard from teachers in the service is that there has been no dialogue between the Ministry and the teachers, and that their professional advice has not been sought in formulating and implementing policies. I agree that the Singapore Teachers' Union, apart from concerning itself with the terms and conditions of service of its members, should also take more than a passing interest in the educational system of our country, and I welcome this desire of members of the Singapore Teachers' Union to be heard on professional matters. My colleagues and I have always made it a point to seek professional advice, though we do not necessarily accept them when formulating policy.

My first impression in the Ministry of Education was that the poor primary school students have been overloaded, and I promised sometime ago that there would be a revision of the curriculum for

the primary schools. This is a good opportunity for the Ministry to harness the specialized knowledge found among the members of the S.T.U., and officials of the Ministry have been in consultation with some principals and teachers of primary schools with regard to the revision of primary school curriculum. The revision is undertaken with the following objectives in mind:

- (a) To examine the specific objectives of learning in the particular areas of study;
- (b) To remove areas of overlap in content both within disciplines and between disciplines;
- (c) To give clearer definition to minimum and maximum expectations in attainment at each level and in each area of knowledge;
- (d) To ensure that the content selected will be related to the child's age, ability and interest;
- (e) To ensure that content in each area of study will enable pupils to develop to the best of their capacity for their own individual benefit as well as that of the State.

As you know, there are many ways of conducting a lesson and teaching a subject, and I believe that if teachers and principals are given some flexibility and be allowed to use their initiative to obtain the objectives laid down, there could be better results and more happiness all round. With this in view, various methods of approach to the teaching of the content will be specified in a companion series of guidelines to the teaching of the curriculum. Each teacher may select his method from one or many of the suggestions in the guidelines or may even decide to provide his own. Each principal will be allowed freedom to arrange the timetable in such a way as to produce the most effective learning for various groups of pupils.

The primary I to primary 6 curriculum will be in three stages, viz., primaries 1 and 2, primaries 3 and 4, primaries 5 and 6. At the end of each two-year period standardized tests will be available for purchase by schools to use as diagnostic checks for the purpose of ascertaining that they have fulfilled the objectives of learning at the end of the period. Thus it will be possible to ensure that there will be no irresponsible use of flexibility.

Only the first stage syllabus will be ready for issue by January 1, 1971. During the first term of 1971, it is intended that there shall be seminars and workshops for discussions with teachers on the new primary I and II curriculum and how it may be best implemented. The Ministry feels that such discussions should form an essential preliminary to3/-

preliminary to every innovative venture which will affect children in schools. The curriculum for Stages II and III, namely for primaries 3 to 6 will be released later, and every effort will be made to ensure that the present pupils in primaries 5 and 6 particularly will not be adversely affected in the public examinations for which they have to prepare.

In drawing up this new curriculum we have sought the views and opinions of some of the principals and teachers in the primary schools. The Ministry will make it a point to consult with those who are on the job before embarking on any policy changes. I believe that we can improve an already sound educational system only if the Ministry and the teachers work closely in the formulation, implementation and execution of policies. I want all those engaged and interested in education to feel that we are one team working towards a common objective. We are not in opposite camps - S.T.U. and teachers on one side - Minister and Ministry officials on the other. If there is any shortcoming in our educational system, all are to be blamed and not only the Ministry.

Since joining the Ministry of Education, I have had several informal discussions with some members of your committee and I must confess that I am greatly encouraged by this approach to some of the problems we face. I have every reason to expect that under their able guidance members of the S.T.U. will be encouraged to adopt a more positive approach towards their work and problems. I look forward to less complaints and more suggestions from members of the teaching profession.

Teachers as a whole have done yeoman service during the last decade. Without their dedication to their calling and the spirit of self-sacrifice we could not have undertaken the great expansion in education that has taken place during the last decade. I only ask for the same dedication to service that has been shown in the past and I look forward to working closely with members of your profession towards solving our educational problems of the 70's. With your goodwill and co-operation, I am confident together we can provide our young citizens with the best education available.

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