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SPEECH BY PROF. WONG LIN KEN, MINISTER FOR HOME
AFFAIRS AT INSTALLATION CEREMONY OF C.C.C. MEMBERS
OF NEE SOON CONSTITUENCY AT NEE SOON C.C. ON
THURSDAY, 24TH FEBRUARY 1972 AT 8.00 P.M.

First, let me thank your Member of Parliament, Mr. Ong Soo Chuan, for the invitation to be here to-night. It is now generally acknowledged that the Citizens Consultative Committees and the Management Committees of Community Centres perform roles beneficial to the government and the community.

Let me, tonight, speak on a role of the community leaders, seldom mentioned in public, and not fully developed. This is shaping public opinion on how a good citizen should exercise his responsibility as a member of his society. To be a good citizen is not merely to obey the laws of the country or to be loyal. A good citizen must also have a responsibility to get his fellow citizens to prefer the good of society to their natural desire of considering themselves more important than society, and to prefer immediate gains to long term collective benefits. It is natural to look after one's interests, but we must acquire the habit of supporting collective benefits where these conflict with personal interests.

Progress and happiness in a united nation - these are the broad aims of our Nation. They are so defined in our National Anthem. We have to achieve them on the basis of certain unalterable facts: namely, a small territory, lack of natural resources, a multi-racial population, and a strategic geographical position. Our domestic and foreign policies can only be realistic if we recognise these limitations.

These realities have determined all our policies, from foreign relations and investments to immigration and citizenship. True, some of these policies are harsh and unpopular. But it is the business of this government to do what is necessary so that your children and mine, and their children's children will continue to enjoy the prosperity we have to-day. Better still, more opportunities, and more prosperity. Let them not go around the world, begging for entry permits, work passes, and citizenships, because we decide to be popular but do the wrong thing.

A society cannot remain for long a stable prosperous society, if political parties or government organize popular support by offering

"give-away" programmes. Voters who tolerate or encourage such destructive competition for power must finally pay the penalty.

A mature electorate must be able to distinguish what is possible and what is impossible. To demand the impossible, and, worse still, to get the impossible implemented, is to bring about ruin. To do the possible, after promising the impossible, is to bring discredit to politicians.

Neither course of action will benefit the country. A small country like Singapore, once broken economically, may never recover. Political parties and government, once discredited, will not recover respect.

For a developing country, it is important that political parties are respected, and government obeyed. We have achieved what we have accomplished in the last twelve years, because the P.A.P. is respected and the authority of the government obeyed. This means policies are effectively carried out, and deficiencies quickly remedied.

Who suffer for policies, popular in the short-run, but destructive in the long run? Who suffer when politicians cease to be respected, and their words are no longer trusted? Not the politicians, not their backers, but the voters who put them in power or throw them off. In Asia, we have examples of people who suffer because of these reasons. To name these people is to cause unnecessary offence. To remember their examples is to ensure we do not make the same mistakes.

One of the essential roles of community leaders is to shape a constructive public opinion. In Singapore, there are two levels of public opinion. One expresses itself in the newspapers; the other in the homes, the coffee houses, the markets and other areas where people meet. It is in the areas outside the newspapers that community leaders can play a constructive role in shaping public opinion about responsible government and political parties.

After more than a decade of political strife, hard work and discipline, we have just reached a position where everyone more or less can get a job. True, the job may not be the one wanted, nor does it carry the wages wished for. But it is better than the position not so long ago, when unemployment was a serious problem. If we continue as we have done in the last two or three years, our economic performance will continue to improve, and we can expect better rewards. But this can only occur if we behave rationally and pursue realistic policies.