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TEXT OF SPEECH BY THE ACTING MINISTER FOR SOCIAL AFFAIRS, DR. AHMAD MATIAR, AT THE OPENING OF THE SERIES OF ORIENTATION SEMINARS ON THE RATIONALE FOR AND IMPLICATIONS OF THE REVISED SECONDARY EDUCATION SYSTEM FOR ITB AND AEB STAFF AT THE CIVIL SERVICE STAFF DEVELOPMENT INSTITUTE ON SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 26, 1977 AT 9.30 A.M.

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Our education system has come a long way from the one we inherited when we first achieved independence. In our first decade of independence, the Government, in addition to building up the structure of education in the schools, also established the Adult Education Board (AEB) and initiated important developments in vocational education.

In 1959 when the Government embarked on transferring Singapore's economy on to an industrial base, we determined that the larger proportion of the workforce would in due course be industrially employed. Industrial training has therefore been recognised as a major instrument of economic policy.

In June 1968, the Ministry of Education was divided into two departments - the General Education Department and the Technical Education Department, the latter to administer the new programme of technical and vocational education and industrial training in Singapore. Under the Technical Education Department (TED), industrial training really began to get underway in the shape that we now know it today. During the years 1968 - 73 the basic framework was established - the setting up of vocational institutes and expansion of workshops, the system of training, the emerging importance of industry-based training and the groundwork for the National Trade Certification Scheme.

But having laid this foundation to provide the skills training for industry, the Government felt that the time had come for industry to play a more decisive role in such training. So in April 1973, the Industrial Training Board (ITB) was established to promote and co-ordinate industrial training in Singapore, taking over and extending the TED's .....2/-

the TED's responsibility for this function. The TED was dissolved and its responsibility for technical education in secondary schools reverted to the Ministry of Education.

The new Board was composed of representatives from government, industry and the labour movement, these being recognised as the sectors which would have the most crucial influence on industrial training. This tripartite consultation is reflected in many of the Board's policies and activities today. It also forms the basis of membership of the Trade Certification Committee which was established this year by the Board to act as independent authority on skills testing and certification. Consultation with industry is further promoted in a variety of ways. Prominent industrial personnel are appointed to the ITB's Trade Advisory Committees to give the benefit of their expertise and first-hand experience in industry in advising the Board on the development of training schemes and syllabuses. Visits are made by the Board members themselves to observe the operations of various types of industries and hold discussions with representatives of the industries on training needs and the ITB's role. The Board also held a public seminar last year to which industrial personnel were invited to express their views on the progress made in industrial training thus far and suggestions on further development.

These contacts with industry provide a useful monitor of its reaction to our training efforts and a pointer to future directions of growth. The ITB is pleased to note that from the feedback so far, its training has on the whole been favourably received by industry. The certificates awarded by the Board are increasingly used as the basis for recruitment of skilled personnel as well as for career advancement as spelt out in collective agreements with trade unions.

In the years to come the trend in industrial training will be towards greater conformity with industrial practice and requirements in our preparation of trainees for their industrial roles. In 1974 the principals of the ITB's training institutes were re-designated training managers, and teachers as training officers. This was done not merely for the sake of changing job-titles, but rather, by adopting the industrial nomenclature for these roles, to bring home to the staff concerned the differences in their responsibilities as compared with the school situation.

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In line with industrial requirements, work attitudes and job safety will receive heavier emphasis during training. Earlier this year the ITB held a seminar on work attitudes to provide the opportunity for training staff to contribute to the promotion of this important area by drawing up the outline of a suitable training programme. As a follow-up of this seminar a booklet on work attitudes is now under production. When published it will be a standard issue to all ITB trainees. A seminar on work safety is being planned for early 1978 and it is expected that a booklet on safety for trainees will also be produced later. Other guides for trainees are being considered so that the future ITB trainee can expect, when he first commences his training, to be issued a set of booklets on various important related subjects that would help orientate him for his career in industry.

With all these developments to help ensure that the ITB's training institutes will be in a better position to conduct training in response to industry's actual needs, let us now take a look at recent developments in the school system which will have far-reaching consequences for the ITB and AEB.

Our Government recognises and accepts that pupils have different aptitudes. There are those who can achieve a fair amount of success in academic pursuits. But there are also others, less academically inclined, who have difficulty with the academic school curriculum. To insist that the latter group continue with the academic programme would be tantamount to subjecting them to severe and unnecessary strain and also denying them the chance to have their other abilities and aptitudes recognised and developed.

The problem of how best to cater for the different aptitudes of our young people is one that has occupied our planners for some time. On this one hand there are shortages of workers in various categories and manpower projections indicate future imbalances between supply and demand. On the other there are the many pupils who, despite showing little academic aptitude, keep being automatically promoted each year eventually to fail when they take the PSLE or GCE 'O' Level Examinations.

With this in mind the Government introduced two innovations since last year - the Basic Course in the Primary School System and the Junior Trainee Scheme that is associated with it and the Revised

Secondary Education System (RSES). Both of these, when fully implemented, will broaden the scope of our education system to provide not only for those who are able to follow the normal school curriculum, but also those whose abilities mainly lie outside this curriculum. The Government in this way aims to find a place for everyone up to the age of 18 years - in a school, training institution or extension education centre, learning skills that would equip him for adult life, or in some form of supervised employment. Vocational training will be accorded parity with academic education in importance.

The success or failure of the RSES lies in you, the staff of the ITB and the AEB, who will be responsible for training the young people channelled to your centres under the scheme. It is therefore imperative that all of you fully understand the rationale and implications of the RSES and appreciate your role in it.

The Government does not accept that children who do not make the grade in academic schools will be failures in life. They must be given an opportunity to succeed at something else. We are giving them this opportunity. The extent of our commitment to their future can be seen in the fact that we are spending far more to train a child in vocational skills than to keep him in school. We would not be spending this money simply to produce failures.

Your task will be to bring out and develop the abilities of the young people who will be joining the ITB and AEB centres, and thus prepare them for a useful career in which they can hold their heads up and see themselves, not as failures and liabilities, but as persons having their own contribution to make to society's well-being. This task will not be easy - for while the methods of academic teaching have been constantly refined over the years through experience and modification of methods found successful elsewhere, in this new venture we have little outside experience to draw upon. You will have to evolve your own approach.

Your task this weekend would be to ponder the implications of the RSES and your role in it. It is vital that we succeed. You, as the trainers, are the crucial pivot on which hangs the whole success of this effort in integrating education with manpower planning. If you should approach these young people who will be under your charge with a sense

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of hopelessness and anticipation of failure from the outset, then fail they will, and the whole scheme with them. But on the other hand, if you persevere and succeed in turning out a young potential worker, confident in his abilities and imbued with the right attitude towards work and a proper sense of his worth in society, then you would have helped pave the way for Singapore's continued progress and a better life ahead for your children and your children's children.

On this note I am pleased to declare open this series of seminars.

NOVEMBER 26, 1977.

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