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SPEECH BY DR AHMAD MATTAR, ACTING MINISTER FOR SOCIAL  
AFFAIRS AND CHAIRMAN, INDUSTRIAL TRAINING BOARD, AT  
THE PRIZE-GIVING CEREMONY OF THE 'TOP OF THE TRADE'  
COMPETITIONS ON THURSDAY, 8 DECEMBER 1977 AT THE  
REGIONAL LANGUAGE CENTRE AT 1000 HOURS

17 DEC 1977

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I am indeed pleased to be here this morning to address you on the occasion of the Prize Presentation Ceremony in connection with the 'Top of the Trade' Competitions organised by the Science Council of Singapore.

As the competition was organised with the primary aim of promoting vocational training, it would perhaps be appropriate for me to say a few words about such training which is vital to the further industrial and economic development of Singapore.

Vocational training is to be regarded as an extension of the education system or, shall I say, a continuation of the education process. As such, while it is the responsibility of the Government to provide vocational training, it is up to the parents to assume the complementary but important role of encouraging their children who are offered the opportunity to undergo skill-oriented training made available by the government through the ITB and the AEB to take full advantage of this.

From 1979 the revised secondary education system will make provision for secondary school pupils to be streamed into vocational training so that they can be equipped with a skill and therefore be prepared for the world of work. The revised secondary education system which is a logical follow-up of the recent rationalization of primary education and the implementation of the Junior Trainee Scheme is not only in line with our economic objective of ensuring the availability of a reservoir of skilled workers to meet the technical manpower requirements for sustained economic growth into the 80's but also makes for rational and optional utilization of our scarce human resources and, to a greater degree than before, affords our youths the opportunity to develop their innate potentials in the right direction so that they can eventually be gainfully employed.

The televising of this timely series of competitions, the first of its kinds ever held should, I am sure, vividly demonstrate to our youth and their parents as well as to the public at large that vocational training is not only meaningful but can also be very satisfying and rewarding.

Through the series of six televised competitions covering a fair sampling of the trades for which the ITB provides vocational training, viewers have seen what ITB trainees are capable of doing within a relatively brief period of training. In addition, a general idea is also given of the nature, type and level of skills acquired by these trainees and of their employment prospects. More important is the portrayal of how such skills can be applied in practical situations, and of how pride in work and satisfaction from a job well done can be developed. Generally, the trainees have impressed viewers with their high standards of skill displayed and their ready grasp of both the practical and theoretical aspects of their trade.

In short, this series of competitions together with the recent "Apprentice-of-the-Year Competition" in the Metal Machining trade recently organised by the ITB, will, I am sure, have had the sum effect of further breaking down any residual prejudice that still remained against blue collar work. I am therefore very pleased to be able to announce that following the success of this year's "Top of the Trade" competitions, the Science Council of Singapore has decided to organise similar competitions on an annual basis. The Industrial Training Board, on its part, also plans to expand the scope of its "Apprentice-of-the-Year" competitions to include other trades besides metal machining for which such a competition was held for the first time this year.

Compared to general education, industrial training is an expensive affair. It costs the government an average sum of \$2,000 per year to train a skilled worker in our vocational institutes. To meet the skill manpower demands right into the 1980's as projected by our economic planners and in keeping with the revised secondary education system, the Government has approved plans to augment the full-time enrolment of the ITB from its present figure of 9,000 to 16,000 in 1981.

Apart from parents, industrialists too have a very major role to play in the promotion of industrial training. They should get more involved in and committed to training as an investment which will bring future returns. This they can do by participating in the apprenticeship training schemes, including the Junior Trainee Scheme, and by making their facilities available for the on-the-job training so necessary for vocational institute graduates to

consolidate and upgrade their institutional training.

In conclusion, I wish to offer my heartiest congratulations to the Competition Organising Committee chaired by Professor Ang How Ghee, Chairman of the Science Council of Singapore, for their efforts in putting up these successful and interesting competitions. I would also like to congratulate the winners and all the other participants whose efforts in these competitions have gone a long way to show the public the prospects and training for the young people of Singapore in the vocational sphere.

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