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INDUSTRIAL TRAINING BOARD AT THE THIRD INDUSTRIAL TECHNICIAN  
CERTIFICATE GRADUATION CEREMONY AT THE SINGAPORE CONFERENCE HALL  
ON MONDAY, 6 NOVEMBER 1978 AT 2.30 P.M.

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Let me first of all extend to you a warm welcome to this Industrial Technician Certificate (ITC) Graduation Ceremony. It is the third since the Industrial Training Board (ITB) first started holding combined graduation ceremonies in 1976.

The origins of the Board's ITC courses can be traced back to 1969 when it was first started at the Singapore Technical Institute (STI) by the then Technical Education Department of the Ministry of Education to bridge the gap between the three-year Technician Diploma courses at the Singapore Polytechnic and the Craft or better known now as the Trade courses at the vocational institutes. The objective was to train more shop floor supervisory and maintenance personnel in view of the growing utilisation of sophisticated machinery and equipment in our industries.

On its inception in 1973, the ITB took over from the Technical Education Department inheriting at the same time the administration of the existing vocational institutes including STI. Since then the Board has further developed and intensified its ITC training programme in order to meet national needs and objectives. Principles of supervision and various aspects of industrial studies have been incorporated into the courses so that ITC graduates would be equipped with sufficient theoretical knowledge to become supervisors when they had proven their worth after a period of on-the-job experience.

In 1974, the Applied Arts training programme at Baharuddin Vocational Institute and the Printing courses at the School of Printing were restructured to include ITC courses. In the one year that it had been established, the ITB thus increased the number of ITC courses from six in 1973 to twelve in 1974.

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When the Singapore Polytechnic in 1975 discontinued its ITC courses while continuing to conduct Three-year Technician Diploma courses, the ITB became the sole organisation conducting ITC courses. There was then an increasing pressure for the ITB to provide a sizeable pool of trained technicians who would be able to learn and use the increasingly sophisticated technologies of our industries.

I am happy to note that the ITB has since successfully expanded its ITC programmes both in terms of increasing enrolment for the existing courses and venturing into new areas to make available the required pool of technicians required for our industrialisation programme.

The expansion of the ITC programme by the ITB is even more obvious if we look back to 1969. Then there were only three courses conducted in Mechanical, Electronic and Shipbuilding Engineering with an enrolment of 147 trainees.

Today, nine years later, there are a total of 1,777 trainees enrolled in 13 courses. This represents not only a substantial increase in the number of courses conducted, but also a 12-fold increase in ITC enrolment.

I imagine that those who are graduating today must be wondering about your job prospects. This is only natural. Fortunately, labour market indicators have shown that there is a strong demand for ITC-holders. Perhaps a significant factor in this demand is the skill-oriented nature of the ITC courses conducted by the Board.

In fact in a survey conducted by the ITB in 1977 on Engineering graduates who had completed their training between 1971 - 1976, a high employment rate of 94% was recorded, allowing for National Service obligations and further full-time studies. This high rate of employment was consistent for both fresh graduates and those who had graduated earlier in the period. Most of the employed graduates were middle-level personnel involved in skilled or technical jobs that made use of their training.

A study of the wages earned reinforces the indications that this class of manpower enjoys a sustained demand. While Electronics Engineering graduates tended to command slightly higher salaries,

graduates from all the ITC courses appeared to be able to look forward to good prospects generally. Over the five-year period covered by the survey, the level of earnings rose commensurate with the number of years of working experience, from an average of about \$450 for a 1976 graduate to about \$850, almost double, for the 1971 graduate.

This is certainly an encouraging sign for young Singaporeans who are becoming more receptive towards blue-collar jobs, as indicated by the fact that 55% of the applicants in the first joint admission exercise for Pre-University education and Technician courses held earlier this year indicated their first preference for courses at the Polytechnic, Ngee Ann or ITB training institutes as against Pre-University.

It has been noted that of all the students who took the 'A' Level Examinations last year, only 20% succeeded in gaining entry to the tertiary institutions in this year's intake. Pre-University education is generally an academic rather than vocational course that does not equip students for any specific kind of work on its completion. Thus many who are unable to pursue higher education after Pre-University simply disappear into the labour market, competing for employment with 'O' level school leavers. Being unskilled and untrained, many of them then find difficulties in career advancement or obtaining job satisfaction.

While we are stressing industrialisation and the building up of a blue-collar workforce, we must also not forget that about 42% of the working population are engaged in clerical, sales and service and related occupations. As Singapore gains prominence as an international commercial and service centre, there will be an increasing need for highly trained clerical and sales personnel to cater for the increasingly sophisticated commercial operations.

At the ITB's Trade and Artisan Graduation Ceremony in March this year, I announced the Government's plan to merge the ITB and AED to become the national authority on industrial vocational and continuing education. The next few years will witness further diversification in the field of training and education. In fact, of immediate concern to the new Board would be the mounting of training programme to cater to the manpower and training needs of both the commercial and the service sectors like the training of clerical personnel and sales personnel. Now that we have seen the

success of the ITC in meeting the manpower requirements of the industrial sector, our commercial training programmes will also be directed along the same line to meet the expanding needs of our commercial sector. If necessary, the development of an advanced commercial training college will also be considered, so that, for 'O' level school leavers who are not technically-inclined, there will be an alternative option to Pre-University education.

In conclusion I would like to announce that of the 1,009 graduates present today, there are 64 in Applied Arts from Baharuddin Vocational Institute, 20 in Printing Technology from the School of Printing, 838 in Engineering trades from Singapore Technical Institute and 37 in Automotive and Industrial Plant Engineering from Singapore Vocational Institute (SVI). The latter in fact constitute the first-ever ITC graduates in Automotive and Industrial Plant Engineering since the courses were first started at SVI in 1976. I would like to congratulate all the graduates present today and may all of you have a rewarding and satisfying career.

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