

SINGAPORE GOVERNMENT PRESS RELEASE

PUBLICITY DIVISION · MINISTRY OF CULTURE · CITY HALL SINGAPORE 6

MC/DEC/43/78 (EDUCATION)

79 0058 2

SPEECH BY THE SENIOR MINISTER OF STATE FOR EDUCATION,
MR. CHAI CHONG YIL, AT THE LIONS CLUB OF SINGAPORE WEST
NEW YEAR'S EVE DINNER AND DANCE AT THE ISLAND BALLROOM,
SHANGRI-LA HOTEL, ON SUNDAY, DECEMBER 31, 1978, AT 8 P.M.

I am very happy to be here this evening celebrating the completion of one calendar year and ushering in a new year. Such a celebration is a custom practised in almost every culture. In Singapore, we do this perhaps a little more often than other peoples. This aspect of our multi-culturalism has naturally its good points as well as bad points.

New year celebration need not mean reckless spending on a lavish scale which business houses would like us to do. The gross commercialisation of festive occasions, abetted by slick commercial advertising, is something we have to combat and come to terms with. What you, the Lions Club of Singapore West, is doing this evening is certainly a step in the right direction. By spending and celebrating together, you are so to speak pooling your resources and cutting down costs. What is more important is that you are spending for a good cause. This fact in itself should make the occasion more meaningful than the usual merry-making.

I am not suggesting, for any moment, that merry-making or enjoying ourselves, is bad. The point is that when we are celebrating joyous occasions, we need not be thinking solely of our own enjoyment. Sharing our good fortune through the act of giving will make us better human beings and lead to more universal peace and happiness.

As a society, we are becoming more and more aware of the adverse effect of materialism on our values and life styles. While it is a fact that we Singaporeans, as a whole, are strongly motivated toward achievement, the achievement tends to be viewed

heavily in2/-

heavily in terms of personal material success. Of course, it would be unrealistic to expect the average person not to regard his personal comfort and well-being and that of his family as the immediate concern of his striving. However, he must not make it the be-all and end-all of his pursuit in life.

The factors that bind a people closely together in more traditional types of social organisations tend to be dissipated by economic forces operating in a modern society. The cash nexus in a modern economy tends to reduce human relationships to the level of profit and loss and condition human behaviour to a pattern of mere getting and spending. Furthermore, modern man tends to assume that his obligations to his society and his fellow human beings are fully discharged through the system of taxation. This sort of attitude though legally irreproachable is socially and morally passive and incomplete. Those who are able and have the means should do more to provide warmth and compassion to the poor and destitute in addition to what the government is doing to relieve their suffering.

Traditionally, through religion and through education, the virtue of giving and sharing has been inculcated. The family unit should make it into a practising reality and not just an ideal. Ultimately, if every individual makes it part of his own value system and builds it into his fabric of personal behaviour, then collectively, we can begin to change our conventional thinking.

I would just like to end on this note. Being a law-abiding citizen and paying one's taxes is not enough. The example you have shown in organising this function is ample proof that you are aware that there is more the individuals, through their clubs and associations, can do towards a more responsive and cohesive society. Let us hope that this fine example will soon become the rule rather than the exception.
