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SPEECH BY MR CHIN HARN TONG, SENIOR PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARY (HOME AFFAIRS) AND MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT FOR ALJUNIED AT THE BARTLEY SECONDARY SCHOOL ANNUAL SPEECH AND PRIZE GIVING DAY ON FRIDAY, 28 AUGUST 1981 AT 10.00 AM

This occasion of your school's 29th Speech and Prize-Giving Day provides me with an appropriate opportunity to talk on education and society. We all know the importance of education for the success of ourselves and our children. But not all of us may realise the need for us to live and work as a fully integrated society for the success of our nation.

The value of a sound education and a healthy society to us, whether as individual persons or as a people collectively, cannot be over emphasised. Education is more than simply a matter of acquiring knowledge and skill, though science and technology are undoubtedly vital to Singapore's continued development. Education is also more than learning how to communicate with one another, though communications are undoubtedly important to Singapore's aspirations to be a centre for industries and financial and other services; that is why we are encouraged to learn more than one language so as to understand better the feelings and views of our fellow Singaporeans. That is also why we are urged to master the English language so as to communicate better with the outside world, to facilitate trade and industry, and to understand better new developments in science and technology.

The many uses and benefits education can give us serve to underline the importance of education. More fundamentally, however, the essence of education is that it helps to mould our character and to train us to live and work in a civilised society by making us aware of our duties and the rights of others. Character is, of course, distinctive and personal to each and every individual; but what we mean by a person having a well-developed and well-rounded character is a person who can live and work in peace, harmony and unison with others. Regardless of the kind of

society we live and work in and our particular station in society, life on earth is full of hard knocks and its surprises are not always pleasant. An educated person is one who is trained to take all these heartaches and disappointments in life in one's stride and without souring one's attitude to life or towards one's fellow beings.

I am not saying life will be full of joy if all the people of the world are educated in the ideal sense of the word. There will always be natural catastrophes such as earthquakes and floods, which are not caused by any human agency. But we should always remember that our records show a great deal of sufferings and unhappiness experienced by people throughout known history have been caused, sometimes unnecessarily so, by human beings to one another. Wars between one nation and another is a prime example. Conflicts between employers and workers is a less obvious, but nonetheless, valid example.

Even in a school which is a social institution designed to promote an environment conducive to the process of learning, life can be made needlessly unpleasant for all by personal disagreements.

What distinguishes a good school from an indifferent school is not so much the age, condition or size of its buildings, facilities and amenities as the attitude of the principal, teachers and students towards one another and towards the school. Undoubtedly, a well-equipped laboratory and library will help a school to produce scholars and a Gymnasium and swimming-pool, sportsmen. But a school whose principal and teachers are motivated by a desire to help their students and not by a desire to work only as hard as they are paid for, will produce scholars and sportsmen without these facilities and amenities. More important, the selfless dedication of the principal and teachers to their vital task will have a lasting influence on many of their students as to the significance of education. The kind of education we receive will have an important bearing on the kind of society we will live and work in.

The Singapore society is like any other society in the non-communist world today. There are Singaporeans in various walks of life and of various social standings and conditions. There are Singaporeans who are happy and contented with what they are. There are other Singaporeans who are restless and always seeking to better themselves. This diversity

of character is what makes Singapore a stable but progressive society. If education can make Singaporeans appreciate the significance of living and working in a society, respect all others as fellow Singaporeans, and help those who are less fortunate, then the money Singapore has spent on education is not wasted.

I take this opportunity to congratulate all prize winners for their achievements and to urge all others who have not won prizes not to be discouraged but to try harder. The last in school may yet be the first in life.

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