

30 MAY 1986

Singapore Government

PRESS RELEASE

Information Division, Ministry of Communications & Information, City Hall, Singapore 0617 • Tel. 3307269 / 3307270 / 3307271

86-CHT-1

Release No: 37/APR
11-3/86/04/26

SPEECH BY MR CHIN HARN TONG, SENIOR PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARY (HOME AFFAIRS), AT THE PRESENTATION CEREMONY OF THE FOOD AND BEVERAGE INDUSTRIAL WORKERS' UNION (FBIWU) SCHOLARSHIP AWARDS 1986 AT THE JURONG WORKERS' CENTRE ON SATURDAY 26 APRIL 1986 AT 2.00 PM

All of us here today have heard or read about the need for workers in Singapore to upgrade their skills. The upgrading of skills is not a strange topic to us. Nor is it a topic that is of interest only to Singaporeans.

All over the world, people are being urged, encouraged, assisted and advised to learn new skills or improve their old skills. We are living in a world, which every day grows more compact because of technological advances in communications and transportation. People who want to live as their ancestors traditionally did, would find increasingly difficult to do so. They have to adapt themselves to changes in their circumstances, some more some less, if they are to survive.

We in Singapore have always been proud of our progress because of our willingness as well as desire, not only to adapt to, but also to anticipate, the changes in our circumstances. We accept we have no natural resources except our skills to offer to the world. We accept we have to depend on what use we can make of our skills to buy and sell products in the world market.

But we have also to accept we may not get what we want because of conditions outside our control. The harder it is for us to make a living in the world, the harder and the better we have to work in order to live. The conditions under which we work would also be correspondingly less favourable.

At the moment, most, if not all, of us are thinking about wage restraint, wage freeze and wage cut in the next one or two years. Whether or not this unpleasant state of affairs will get better or worse, remains to be seen. But we should not allow ourselves to be shocked into total paralysis. We can at least try our best to improve matters.

One fact is at least certain and that is that we must always make sure our skills are good enough for us to make a living with. Whether it is boom-time or slump, we must keep on sharpening old skills or acquiring new skills. The difference between having excellent and up-to-date skills and having poor or outdated skills during boom-time is the difference between prosperity and subsistence. In a slump, the difference is between life and death.

Learning to improve old skills or learning to acquire new skills is part of the life-long process of learning. From the moment we are born, we do not stop learning until we are dead. By learning we mean the process of observing or watching what others do, remembering what we have seen, and applying what we know.

Learning is a natural process, which does not have to take place in a formal setting, such as a school or a training course. We all can learn if we want to do so, by paying careful attention to what is going on around us, we all can benefit from our own experience of life.

But attending a school or a training course makes the learning process easier for us. We don't have to become globe-trotters or gray-haired to learn new or better skills. We benefit from the accumulated experience and expertise of our teachers and instructors by learning what they have to teach to us. Schools and training courses serve as magnifying glasses for focussing and concentrating on the learning process.

As trade unions aim, among other things, to upgrade the skills of their members and their dependents, scholarships, bursaries and training awards are ways and means by which trade unions carry out their aim. Trade unions, through these scholarship awards, seek to bring the learning process within the convenient reach of the industrial workers' children. We should, therefore, remember all we have learned and also remember to apply what we have learned. In this way, we will benefit ourselves, our families, and our community.

- - - - -

B8/PAS1/Pgs.1-3