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**SPEECH BY MR GOH CHOK TONG, FIRST DEPUTY PRIME  
MINISTER AND MINISTER FOR DEFENCE, AT THE 20<sup>TH</sup>  
ANNIVERSARY OF NTUC INCOME DAY 1990 AT THE RAFFLES  
BALLROOM, THE WESTIN STAMFORD & WESTIN PLAZA ON  
SATURDAY, 17 NOVEMBER 1990 AT 7.15 PM**

When I was working in NOL, I learned how to minimise business risks, by insuring them. The ships were insured against damages and total loss. So were the cargoes. When we bought two product tankers which required special painting for its internal tanks, we insured the process against failure. There were frequent strikes by the Australian water-front workers. We even insured against that.

I wish I can do the same for Singapore. If I can, I will insure the economy against mass unemployment, high inflation and loss of market opportunity.

If any insurance company in the world is willing to sell me such a policy at a reasonable premium, I will gladly take it. Then you and I, and the whole of Singapore, can sleep peacefully every night. Unless the worst happens, i.e. we are taken over by a foreign aggressor, we will have something to fall back on during an economic crisis.

But that is just wishful thinking.

Nevertheless, I still spend a lot of time thinking about this. If our economy fails, or if our defence collapses, there is no safety net from insurance. So we must prevent it from happening at all. The question is – how? How do we insure our future?

There is only one way. It is to get honest, capable and dedicated Singaporeans to come forward, stand for elections and form an effective Government that will anticipate problems and find solutions. The leaders we want must have the moral courage to take the long-term view, never giving in to the temptation of going for short-term gains if these conflict with the long-term goals. They must have the skills to get the people to follow them.

This is the secret of our success. Two political scientists, Milne and Mauzy, from the University of British Columbia, drew this perceptive conclusion in their book, "Singapore – the Legacy of Lee Kuan Yew":

"The leadership's habits of calculation, reason, generally placing of realism above emotion, and insistence on the proper implementation of policy have paid massive dividends (Singapore's) success has been due to its leadership skills rather than to the use of any particular techniques for economic development." (Pg 180).

To build on what Mr Lee has achieved, we must get the best we can to lead Singapore. Our problem is where to find these people. Many who can serve simply have no desire to take part in politics.

Count me out, they say. I am not cut out for politics, they add.

I understand their reaction perfectly. I too had no natural interest in politics. I am not a natural in politics and I never dreamt of becoming a Minister.

My first choice after graduating was to be a professor. I wanted to do a PhD. So I signed up as a Research Scholar at the Singapore University. My intended research topic was "Capital formation and economic growth".

Two weeks after I started, the Vice-Chancellor called me up. He said that the Government wanted me to work in the Civil Service as an Administrative Officer. They would not release me. I was then under a five-year bond, because of a bursary I received. I was put in the Economic Planning Unit.

I worked there for about one year, until I saw an advertisement by Shell. I applied. After a series of interviews and tests, plus a lunch where they observed how you behaved socially, I got the job. They also gave me a loan to pay up my bond.

So I resigned from the Civil Service, brought forward the date of my marriage so that I could go for my honeymoon before starting on the new job, and happily went off with my wife to Malaysia.

Halfway through our honeymoon, I got a telegram from Shell: Come back immediately. I thought they needed my services immediately. Instead they told me that Dr Goh Keng Swee had expressed unhappiness over their taking me.

They would still take me in, nevertheless, if I insisted on joining them. I sensed their reluctance. So I returned the loan I took from Shell, and went back to the Economic Planning Unit.

Later, I was seconded to NOL. I was very happy there. I thought I had found my niche in life.

Then in 1976, the late Mr Hon Sui Sen called me up. I thought he was going to ask me to re-join the Civil Service. Instead, he asked me to stand for elections. I was surprised. I was not a good public speaker. I had no grassroots experience, and I had not shown the slightest interest for politics. In any case, I thought that Mr Lee Kuan Yew and his Cabinet still had many more years to go, and should be in no hurry to recruit people for the government.

Mr Hon said he was getting old. He wanted to train up somebody to take over from him. He said it was important for able younger Singaporeans to take over from the older leaders.

So here I am, a politician, a man who wanted to be a professor, an oil company executive, and a shipping man. My initial bond to serve the

government for five years has become a bond for life. But I have no regrets. It is very satisfying to be able to contribute my bit to the welfare of our nation.

I have told you the story of my life because I want to make this call to all those who think that they are not cut out for politics but have the qualities for public service. If you are invited, please consider carefully before you say 'no'. If you want to make Singapore your home, come forward, and insure your children's future. You don't have to be a born politician.

And if just one man or woman responds to my invitation, and he or she becomes an MP, NTUC INCOME can claim that it is the only insurance organisation that has helped to insure a country's future.

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