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SPEECH BY MR HOWE YOON CHONG, MINISTER FOR HEALTH,
AT POTONG PASIR NATIONAL DAY DINNER AT THE POTONG PASIR
COMMUNITY CENTRE ON SUNDAY, 5 AUGUST 1984 AT 7.30 PM

Tonight we celebrate our National Day as well as the 25th Anniversary of nation building. It is a very auspicious occasion.

Having been your MP since February 1979, I think it is time that I share some deeper thoughts with you now that I have decided to step down from politics to make way for new leadership. At the next National Day Dinner in 1985 you will be addressed by a new MP.

The thoughts that come to my mind are that in our kind of politics our people pay more attention to the trivialities and believe in many half-baked foreign ideas they pick up from the mass media. The more serious matters that affect the very life and survival of Singapore are often ignored in the mistaken belief that all is well or that the world owe us a living.

Few are bothered even about the difficulties that confront our own Potong Pasir Constituency or how to improve the conditions here so that every man, woman, and child can live a better life with dignity and with hope of a better future. Many consider minor matters like how to get better advantages or to make money out of Government activities to be of more immediate importance. These people want to jump queues, to get their Housing Board flats earlier, or to obtain cooked-food stalls instead of market stalls for dried goods; or how to get their sons exempted or deferred from

National Service, or how to have their summonses for minor offences cancelled. If their MP is to do all these things, then he cannot be of much use. Members of Parliament must have more important things to do. If they believe that MP's are only to dish out favours in return for their votes, the people of Singapore will be playing into the hands of crooked politicians who promise everything and deliver nothing.

Over the past 30 or 40 years some very important and far-reaching ideas have been able to catch the imagination of many people. But one by one all of them have been proven by time to be failures. Let us examine a few.

(i) British trade unionism which was meant to raise the dignity of the worker and to prevent the exploitation of employees by wicked and uncaring employers. Those who know about trade unionism today and have read about the miners' strike, know that workers are not being exploited by the wicked capitalist, but it is more the other way round. The result is that Britain has been brought down to very low levels of economic performance, and its people suffer. Yet the unionists and the politicians continue to play games as if all is well.

(ii) State welfarism - In the 1930's this beautiful and very humane idea of the State looking after everybody from cradle to grave was very well received. Everyone from the intelligentsia to the common citizen thought it was a really good idea. If you look around, you will find all those countries that have practised state welfarism in Europe and America now have in grave doubts about welfarism. Every country is trying to get out of it, but cannot do so. Those which had implemented comprehensive welfare systems are slowly but surely declining. Their industries have stagnated or gone bankrupt because the attitude of their people to work or their willingness to work had changed. If

state welfare can provide all your needs for no effort in return, why work at all! European countries are now finding it impossible to keep up with the progress in America and Japan because of state welfarism. As long as they continue with their welfare policies they can only go one way down.

(iii) The third idea is communism. It was an idea that caught on like wild fire ever since Lenin overthrew the Russian Tzarist regime. "Workers of the world unite, you have nothing to lose but your chains!" So the slogan goes. The workers have lost their chains but no thanks to communism! The biggest communist country today is China. The greatest success of communism in China is to turn a hardworking population into a lazy one. In all its 5,000 or more years of civilization, the Chinese people had been hardworking, whatever the regime or the power that controlled or ruled them. Today under communism with its iron rice-bowl, the workers are no longer prepared to work more than the minimum. Since the workers are paid a fixed salary, whether they worked hard or not, every worker under the communist system decided it would be better to be lazy. When the idea of communism is abandoned and free enterprise is permitted the Chinese people quickly returned to be their hardworking selves again. The signs are that the Chinese will get back to their former hardworking way of life when communism is discarded.

Singaporeans must take heed that what has immediate appeal to them may only be a passing fad and may not be of long term benefit. What is more crucial, they must know that while other larger countries can get a second or third chance when they go wrong, Singapore is not permitted such a luxury. We had one chance when we became independent and opted for the kind of society today - high productivity, continuing upgrading of skills for economic development and progress; and nothing for free - to each according to his merit and effort, for each according to his work and productivity. We change this at our peril. Once we go wrong and go down, we shall remain down.