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ADDRESS BY MR LIM CHEE ONN, NTUC SECRETARY-GENERAL AT THE INAUGURATION
OF NTUC COURTESY CAMPAIGN, AT THE NTUC AUDITORIUM ON MONDAY,
4 JUNE 1979 AT 11 AM

Economically, we have come a long way from the days when Singapore was just a fishing village. We have achieved a standard of living which was unimaginable only 15 years ago. Today, we stand on the threshold of the 1980s, ready to embark on the next phase of our industrialisation and development programme. However, it would serve us well to pause every now and then and take stock of the progress we have made in areas other than economic development.

Courtesy - A Vital Attribute

2 In our drive to develop higher value added industries, we must not neglect those other values which are the corner stones of any civilised society. I am referring to values such as concern, consideration and care for others. The preservation of these values will enable our society to rise to still greater heights.

3 To be successful in attracting higher value added industries into Singapore, we need to expand the pool of disciplined workforce. This calls for a greater measure of self-discipline on the part of both managers and workers and it is fitting in this context to observe that self-discipline is also fundamental in the development of courteous and considerate attitudes. The development of these attitudes in our workers is therefore the start of building up a disciplined workforce. This underlines the importance of the present national courtesy campaign.

4 At the same time, unions, employers and government must ensure that success in increasing mechanisation or in creating a more capital intensive industry is not equated with decreased humanisation and with depersonalisation. We must not allow the development of this form of alienation amongst fellow workers. If we permit our head-long pursuit of greater economic growth and higher technology to blind us to the need to cultivate a more courteous, tolerant and forbearing society, then I am afraid Singapore will end up as a society of humanoids efficient and effective but devoid of feelings

towards our fellow men and ignorant of our responsibilities towards society as a whole.

5 It is for these reasons that the NTUC and its affiliates give their whole-hearted support to this National Courtesy Campaign. However, a campaign by its very nature only lasts for a limited period of time. Once the glamour, fuss and excitement have faded, there will be a tendency for many to revert to their old habits and ways of life.

6 My call therefore is to all employers and workers at the level of the factory floor, office, worksite and other work places to make special efforts to be courteous to one another and to create an increased awareness of the need for courtesy at all times. While activities and programmes held during the campaign will educate people on the finer points of life and basic social graces, the crux is whether we can succeed in establishing courtesy and tolerance as a habit amongst trade union leaders, workers, managers and indeed amongst us all.

7 On the union level, it is only right that concern is focussed towards the group. Members have to identify with the group and work as a team to promote group interest. This situation must continue and should be encouraged. However, this does not mean that we must lose our respect and concern for the individual. Although courtesy relates to the individual and his needs, consideration for the individual and promotion of group interest are not mutually exclusive. On the contrary, they must reinforce each other. In other words, union solidarity will be at a much higher level if a greater number of our members make courtesy our way of life.

Courtesy and Industrial Relations

8 Many industrial relations problems at the shop floor have been attributed to poor communications or misunderstanding by one or the other party. I would add that such misunderstandings are frequently caused by discourteous attitudes and behaviour on one or both sides.

9 Instructions and directives given in a haughty manner by an overbearing manager will surely meet with an uncooperative response from employees. It is not often realised that the introduction of change at short notice is the epitome of discourteous behaviour on the part of management. Employees should not be blamed for treating such tactics of their employers with disdain. No manager should expect, nor will he deserve, full support of his proposed changes if he insists for example, in giving a 24-hour notice of his intentions. The common saying that "All doors open to courtesy" is not an exaggeration.

10 Mutual respect is one of the hallmarks of courtesy. Employers who ignore the need to generate mutual respect do so at their own peril. Surprisingly many managers and supervisors seem to be ignorant of this principle. In fact some even choose to be deliberately awkward and difficult in their dealings with unions and employees, creating in the process an industrial relations environment which is far from healthy. What is pathetic is that these are the same employers who belly ache and cry wolf about difficult employees. In fact they do not deserve any sympathy but rather ought to be given the full measure in answer to their uncouth and discourteous behaviour.

11 The recent case of an employer which deliberately placed obstacles in the path of a union attempting to organise its employees really takes the cake. Instead of working with the union to create a harmonious environment on which to build a strong relationship, this management chose to prevent the union from organising its employees and offered a variety of untenable and ludicrous reasons for their action. What is despicable is that the equivalent category of employees in other similar establishments have long been classified as bargainable employees. And yet the management of this establishment insisted otherwise. Eventually, and quite rightly too, the Ministry of Labour ruled in favour of the union. But the damage has already been done.

12 By being unreasonable and intransigent, this company's relationship with the union has started on a wrong footing. Instead of a

pleasant working relationship between employees and management, there will be suspicions and distrust because of management's foolish attitude. That a well-established bank of international repute is capable of committing such folly is difficult to comprehend. The object lesson for other employers is clear and simple. As you have sown, so shall you reap.

13 Another way of saying this is, that courtesy begets courtesy. Employees, in their turn, are therefore not exempted from being courteous, agreeable and considerate. By the same token, they are expected to be courteous and fair not only to their fellow workers but also to everyone with whom they come into contact. Working in close proximity with supervisors, managers, colleagues and so on over long periods of time, a certain amount of friction in workers' relationship with others is unavoidable. However courtesy is a good lubricant and works to the benefit of all.

14 Unions therefore have a vital role to play in promoting courteous habits among our members. NTUC and its affiliates, co-operatives and union branches will encourage their officials and members at factory and grassroot levels to inculcate in all workers this quality of being courteous in their dealings with others. This will be done through a series of unions' programmes and activities. Active participation by workers and managements will be the order of the day.

15 As members of a rugged society, it does not follow that we have to be discourteous, selfish and brutish to show that we are tough. Unfortunately, there are many who are like rough diamonds which need their rough edges smoothed to do justice to their true worth. This courtesy campaign is a polishing process out of which many will emerge at the end of the day, polished and shining brilliantly. Singaporeans while being tough, durable and resilient will be at the same time attractive and pleasing if they can acquire this added lustre, as a final polish.