

Singapore Government PRESS RELEASE

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24 JAN 1981
18-01/01/19.

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ADDRESS BY MR LIM CHEE ONN, MINISTER WITHOUT PORTFOLIO AND
CHAIRMAN, NTUC-TASK FORCE, AT THE SILO/PIEU DELEGATES CONFERENCE
AT SINGAPORE CONFERENCE HALL ON 19 JANUARY '81 AT 10.30 AM

Workers and unions have been preparing themselves to meet the challenges of the '80s as shown by their adoption of the NTUC Plan of Action For The '80s, and subsequent implementation of this Plan for the past 15 months.

Effective implementation requires union leaders, branch officials and rank-and-file members to put in that extra effort to understand the imperatives that govern our further progress over the next decade, and having appreciated the basic thrust of the plan, set about moving the rank and file in the right direction. Unions' and workers' acceptance of the second tier NWC wage increase as a means of motivating workers to excel is one such example.

Workers have responded with vigour and enthusiasm because our union and branch leaders know from experience that the reason why we have succeeded in making progress when so many other countries with better resources have failed, is that we have always taken adequate preparation to meet changing circumstances and uncertainty.

We have always planned for the longer term, anticipating problems and taking adequate steps to meet them squarely, instead of doing nothing and hoping that the problems will either not materialise or will simply disappear after a while. It has been clear thinking, bold plans, and disciplined execution that have brought us to where we are today.

To meet the challenges of a restructured economy where a skilled workforce, high technology, and high value-added products will be the order of the day, unions representing industrial

workers have set about reorganising themselves in preparation for these changes. This is to enable the unions to serve industrial workers more effectively, particularly in helping them to secure the maximum benefits that the new opportunities will bring. The most effective way of achieving this is to create a climate in which managements and workers will want to give of their best in order that the company will do well. They will do so because they know that when the company or factory is not doing well, neither management nor workers will flourish.

Looked at in another way, it will be effective teamwork which will determine how successful any enterprise will be. And as is known to all, a team whose members pull in different directions will not only be ineffective but will also destroy themselves in the process. Hence everyone must put in his maximum effort at the outset, each worker, whether management or production staff, has his own responsibility to fulfil and contributions to make without waiting for the other party to make the first move. This is the rationale behind the setting up of the various Working Committees mooted by the NTUC.

We must also succeed in creating this team spirit in the whole labour force. We are competing with very strong teams from Taiwan, South Korea and Hong Kong. To beat them we must have resolve to excel collectively. No one can afford to slacken as everyone loses when we lose the game.

We therefore have to start at the enterprise level, with branch officials and employees working with management to achieve the basic targets of better quality and higher productivity through various means - better management, skill upgrading, technological innovation and better discipline. Generally this calls for better leadership at all levels both in the unions and in management.

The industrial workers have responded by making the effort to reorganise themselves into industrial unions. This is both logical and necessary.

As industries become more complex and sophisticated, it takes greater effort for union leaders, branch officials and workers to understand the intricacies of the factors that determine an industry's growth and prospects. This same fact applies at

factory level. Unions formed along industrial lines will be in a better position to help workers acquire this understanding because of their greater degree of specialisation. This understanding in turn will enable unions and workers to make the right decisions which will enhance their future prospects.

The ability of union leaders to assess the future of each industry, understand the operations of the company and its prospects, and appreciate the needs of each group of workers becomes even more critical as we complete the third and final stage of our corrective wage policy this year. Henceforth, wage increases will once again be pegged to productivity increase, inflation and other key factors such as our competitiveness in the world markets. This means that unions, workers and managements cannot spare any effort in increasing our product quality and industrial productivity if we look forward to ever-increasing wage levels. Our industrial unions will provide the foundation for our industrial workers to achieve this.

During the past 10 months, the NTUC Task Force, which was set up on 15 March 1980 to lay the ground work for establishing industrial unions, has concentrated its efforts in five main areas:

- (i) Operations of various funds and saving and welfare schemes in SILO and PIEU;
- (ii) Administration and organisation structure of SILO and PIEU;
- (iii) Preparatory work for the formation of industrial unions by the 516 branches in SILO and PIEU;
- (iv) Career development for union staff; and
- (v) Grooming of leaders for the industrial unions.

The main findings and recommendations of the Task Force are contained in the Report which has been circulated to the delegates. Many of the recommendations have been accepted by the Executive Councils of SILO and PIEU and have been implemented. We are therefore well on the way to the establishment of the first industrial union for SILO and PIEU branches.

Today's conference of SILO and PIEU delegates marks a watershed in the history of the industrial workers. You delegates represent some 100,000 industrial workers who in turn are part of a labour force of over 300,000 workers in the manufacturing sector. Your decisions today will not only launch the industrial unions but will also lay the foundation for our industrial work-force to make the quantum leap into the next phase of our industrial development. When we succeed in doing so, all Singaporeans can look forward to a bright future despite the ominous clouds of uncertainty ahead.

