

# Singapore Government

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SPEECH BY MR LIM CHEE ONN, MINISTER WITHOUT PORTFOLIO,  
AT THE PASOKAN KOMPANG BELIA REDHILL CELEBRATION  
HELD AT THE BUKIT MERAH COMMUNITY HALL,  
BLOCK 166 BUKIT MERAH CENTRAL ON SATURDAY, 9 MAY '81 AT 8.00 PM

As your patron, I am very pleased and honoured to share this auspicious occasion with you. Indeed I am very delighted to learn that you have won awards at regional and national levels since your group's formation only two years ago.

The fact that you have done well demonstrates one very important point which is now attracting the attention of every Singaporean, and that is the question of team work. I am certain that had not each and every member of your team put in his best effort during the competitions you participated in as well as practice sessions, you would not have done so well.

For a person to want to give of his best whether working individually or collectively, motivation is necessary. It is not so much monetary rewards nor prizes that a person usually works for. Often it is simply the thought of receiving recognition for a job well done that spurs one on to greater heights of performance.

It is also clear that to be motivated, every worker should be given the chance to show his capabilities and competence. This could be achieved by involving him in decision-making, asking him to give his recommendations on how to improve production output, or even allowing him to suggest how to improve playing the kompang in a more effective way. In this way, not only would the overall performance of the team improve, but equally important a team spirit which is so essential for success would also be created.

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This fact came through very vividly in a recent feature article which compared two well known American and Japanese steel manufacturers. Both managements recognised the need to involve workers and hence encouraged them to contribute ideas on how to improve the plant operations. However the approaches they took to achieve their objectives were different and so were the environments of the workplaces. As expected the outcomes of the two companies' efforts were totally different.

In the American company where the relationship was tense and where management staff and workers merely tolerated one another, only 7,000 ideas were produced by the workers despite generous prize monies offered for good suggestions. In contrast, workers in the Japanese company submitted 200,000 ideas, 63,000 of which were adopted. Needless to say, the dramatic difference in response from the workers did not lie so much in the competence of the average worker in the two companies but rather in the management-labour relationship that prevailed in each of these companies.

This telling example provides us with a very compelling reason why we in Singapore should make an all out effort to create the environment in which management and workers in every establishment should work as a team. Moreover, both employers and employees must see that their interest lies in mutual co-operation. Managements cannot survive if workers do not respond and neither can workers flourish if managements cannot manage. In the final analysis, when neither party takes its role seriously, the whole company goes down the drain.

The success of the Pasokan Kompong Belia Redhill has shown that Singaporeans can work as a team for a common interest. What is required is the motivation to excel and the recognition to be granted to those who make the effort.

The unions will work with managements and the Government to achieve this team spirit. The NTUC on its part will continue to educate our workers on the benefits that can accrue to them if they showed loyalty and a sense of duty towards their company.

This is the reason why NTUC and its affiliates spared no efforts in encouraging employers to implement the second tier wage increment for outstanding workers as recommended by the NWC in 1980. As at end March 1981, out of a survey of 951 branches of our major affiliates, 699 branches or 74 per cent of them have introduced performance appraisal systems and implemented the second tier wage increase. These figures exclude the public sector which is a large employer and which has recently also implemented the second tier. We will continue to encourage employers to introduce fair and equitable performance appraisal systems so that every worker is motivated to excel in whatever he does. We will continue to impress upon the NWC that it is through motivation by sensible and sensitive schemes that workers can achieve excellence in performance.

The question of mutual survival and interest was also vividly illustrated by the examples of these two steel companies. In 1959 when workers in the Japanese steel company went on a 39-day strike over wage demands, the workers on returning to work found that their walk-out dramatically reduced the company's sales and profits. As a result of this experience the workers thereafter strove even harder not to inflict damage and injury on themselves, their company and the steel industry. Instead they co-operated with management to improve their management-labour relationship and subsequently reaped the benefits of higher productivity and better company performance.

Ironically the last big American steel strike was also in 1959. There was a 116-day walk-out which resulted in American customers being forced to purchase foreign steel. As a result of that industrial action, relations between management and workers became more strained and production was affected. Moreover, unfortunately for the American steel workers, the strike enabled American customers to find out that not only was imported steel cheaper than American steel but that it was equal or better in quality. The import of foreign steel to replace domestic steel has not subsided much since then. The net result is the need for the United States to consider introducing trade barriers to restrict steel imports in order

to mitigate the poor prospects for the American steel industry and American steel workers. There are doubts that this will be the solution.

Like workers in other countries, we too have a choice to make. Do we want to move up the economic ladder and increase our workers' earning capacity or should we take the easy way out by resting on our laurels and hoping to take refuge behind trade barriers? Unfortunately, the lack of a domestic market and natural resources, and sole reliance on our most precious asset, namely our human resource, does not give us any options. The answer is stark and simple.

Popularity seeking policies must give way to sound and hard-headed decisions. We must pursue relentlessly our objective of preserving and improving the long term interest of all Singaporeans even if this means that some of us have to make sacrifices in the short run. It means that those in leadership positions must be able to make the right decisions for the common good. Our older leaders have done so in the past and we have consequently progressed. Our young leaders shall continue with this tradition for this is a matter of collective survival and prosperity.

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