

The Future of Singapore Depends Heavily Upon Its Cleanliness

Address during a Meeting with the Cleansing Staff (Monthly Rated) at the Singapore Conference Hall and Trade Union House (11 May 1967)

Gentlemen:

Today, I want to talk to you about the next step or the next two objectives we must try to achieve in the reorganisation of the Cleansing Department and standard of cleansing maintenance.

The first objective is good supervision of the work that is being done by the daily-rated workers.

I do not want to tell you how important it is that if you want standards to be kept up - the human being such as he is - if you do not have proper supervision, standards must go down. It is inevitable. You take this Emergency Cleansing Corps - their productivity as against that of the old public cleansing workers.

At the beginning, the Emergency Cleansing Corps productivity was higher partly because they are keen, they work harder, they want a permanent job, they are younger and also because the permanent workers have developed all kinds of bad practices and habits. But it is inevitable that once you merge them, they will become uniform first, because as the Emergency Cleansing Corps becomes permanent, the same drive and enthusiasm to get a permanent job cannot be maintained, because the job is already permanent and you don't want to be trying too hard all the time and also because, many of the malpractices have been got rid of. I am not saying that all is well. But you can already see one going down in his level, the other being pushed up, and, in the end, it will be very difficult to differentiate between the quality of the effort put in.

We have sorted out this problem of trade unionism amongst the daily rated. Trade unionism in the past became a kind of cover, a blind, for malpractices. And everybody then indulged in all kinds of little rackets all behind this check or protection of trade union officials who said, 'No, you can't do this. You can't sack this chap; there is the grievance procedure, and so on'. It took a long time. I tried to reeducate them. I tried to argue the leaders round to sensible approach. They lost the argument, you know. So, step by step, they had to give way until finally, they had to agree to reorganisation. And when it was sent to arbitration last year as a result of an appeal from the National Trades Union Congress, it was clearly understood - and the whole of the NTUC agreed, including the Public Daily-Rated Union - that reorganisation would proceed, pending whatever the arbitration that would go on. This was because they knew it was wrong. All the NTUC leaders knew what was going on in the Public Daily-Rated Union, including the leaders of the Federation. But for some reason, they decided to fight it in the end, because too much invested interest was involved.

We have solved that, and I think, if we maintain proper supervision, all will be well. And, after perhaps a year or a year-and-a-half, perhaps two years, a new union will be

formed, which I hope will understand that trade unionism is not a cover for all these rackets of creating overtime and intimidation of supervisors until they are afraid to report and take action.

I want to talk to you about the problem of trade unionism amongst the monthly rated, the supervisory staff. I want to be quite frank because I think nothing is to be gained by sugar-coating too much.

We want a population, a people who have self-respect and dignity. Therefore, we encourage trade unionism because, if you allow everybody to hire and fire at will, you get a cowed working force. You know people will say, 'Oh, the boss can sack you any time he doesn't like you'. So, you bow, you cringe. That kind of a population is not good for us. We want a population that has some dignity, self-respect, Start off first with that key point.

The history of the trade union movement here is, in large part, the history of our political struggle. You were afraid of the white boss who kept you down, so we organised them to fight this. But, in the process, it became distorted, and trade unionism, instead of just giving self-respect and self-discipline, became a cover for rackets, indiscipline and inefficiency. And the trade unionists of the supervisees' came to feel that, as fellow trade unionists, they had to protect themselves, protect one another.

Here again, I think trade unionism has become perverted partly also because it was allowed in the old days - and this is one of the things I have to live with, because I fought for these things though for different reasons, mind you - it was allowed for the supervisor and the supervisee to join the same union. It then became inevitable that the supervision would feel a kind of fellow trade union feeling and say, 'Well let's go slow on him. After all, we all belong to the same union. The employer pays. Why worry?' The employer pays but, in the end, it is the country which pays because productivity goes down.

One of the rules for new unions is: supervisor and supervisee will join different unions; they will not join the same union. And, what is more - I want to make it quite clear - we have broken malpractices at the supervisee level, and I want no malpractices at the supervisor level. You must, therefore, understand that, in order to perform your function, you cannot allow this sentiment of 'We are all fellow workers, fellow trade unionists' to interfere with your duties.

I have met the senior officers separately for the purpose of getting an assessment of how much improvement there can be if there is proper and strict supervision. And the assessment is probably 10, perhaps 20% improvement. But there are problems about the job itself. If there is one supervisor for 55 men spread over a wide area, even if the supervision does nothing but takes a bicycle or his scooter and chases them all around, there are still limitations.

But whatever it is, I want that 10% to 20% improvement to be made because once you slacken on the supervision, the whole effort goes down. And, after a while as I have told you, the Emergency Cleansing Force and the old work force get the same results - which it must be in any case, because human beings are like that.

I want to tell you the second objective of this meeting today. I think we want to spotlight the other half.

The first half is that the cleansing machine must be efficient. The workers on the ground, the supervisors, the equipment they are given, the overall planning, the system of clearance - all that must be efficient. But the other half is the man who creates rubbish - the public. And this is a point, which I think will play a very important part in your work over the next phase of this campaign to make this really one of the cleanest cities in Asia.

You can see the kind of industrial refuse...

First of all, there are different kinds of refuse. Different people create different rubbish. Your industrial refuse is chucked often with no proper containers, onto the roads. With every shipment that comes in, there are cabbage leaves outside markets, shops. You know that there has been a new ship, whether it is cabbages along New Bridge Road or straw and packing cases along High Street. There are no dustbins. The laws are out of date. You fine them \$10. It is cheaper to pay the \$5 or \$10 fine. They just send their assistant clerk to plead guilty and to pay the \$10. If they want to clear the rubbish, they will have to get a lorry and two or three workers, and this might cost them \$50. So it is easier to pay the \$10. And, just in case of the cows and the sheep and the goats which we had to deal with in 1964, so with this. The laws are going to be changed.

The first fine for industrial refuse may be \$150; the second, \$500; and the third, \$1,000. And when they start thinking, they will find it better to get a lorry and the workers to clean up.

We know that probably half or perhaps more than half of the households of Singapore have no dustbins. But, first, we will go for the big rubbish creators. The importers, exporters and the manufacturers must understand that the roadside or the drain is just not the place for their rubbish. There must be proper containers. There must be inducements to make it more profitable to keep the place clean than to litter it.

Then, you have the domestic consumer. The estimation is, half the houses have no dustbins. New laws will have to be passed. We are liaising with the Economic Development Board (EDB). Somebody will be given a chance to design new dustbins which are cheap and efficient. We will supply houses each with a dustbin. The bill for it will come with the water and light. And every time a dustbin is missing, a new one will be replaced and be entered with the water and light bill.

Old problems which have got out of hand must be tackled afresh. Litter boxes or baskets: Again, we will get in touch with the EDB. Some firm in Jurong will manufacture them. Every park, every bus shelter and every street will be provided with one. That is the first stage. We will first provide the proper physical means for control.

Once that phase is over - probably in six months or at the most, in nine months - then whoever is found with rubbish outside his shop, will be subject to penalties. He has, otherwise, to prove that the rubbish is not his. This is, I think, the only way.

In short, the work of the supervisor is no longer just to see that your head - the HEO or whoever is in charge of you - does not feel that you are shirking. The attitude of 'So long as there are no complaints, we just carry on' is not likely to bring up standards. Ways and means must be devised to reward the chap who does his duty and does it well - whether it is by way of bonuses or promotions - and also to penalise and to get rid of those who are not pulling their weight.

Let me recapitulate the two things which I have said I want to do today. First, to spotlight the need for the machine to be made efficient. We are settling the daily rated problems. Now, I want to come to the problem of the monthly rated. It is not such a big problem. But nevertheless, 10% to 20% improvement can be made with proper supervision.

When I met you the last time, I was told that supervisors were even afraid to report on the workers because it meant trouble. It was not only intimidation. A person could actually get beaten up. That is over now. And it must never be allowed to redevelop to a point where the supervisor is afraid.

It is not just a job for the daily rated and the monthly rated but also for the planners. This kind of machines that are put into use, the kind of planning where incinerators or dumping grounds are placed and so on - all these must be efficiently worked out. That is one half of the problem, which we have tackled first because I think that is the order in which it must be tackled. The machine must be first made efficient and now, we will move in the next few months to the second phase: the attack on the rubbish creators.

This is where supervisors must play a new role. You must not only make sure that your men have done their job. You have also to make sure that the public or parts of the public do not make the job more difficult for your men. It is a very unpleasant business. I mean, the householder will probably feel greatly outraged and so on. But we have to re-educate our people, and you have to help us re-educate them. First, we will do it by persuasion: telling them over television, radio and the newspapers the 'dos' and 'don'ts', the reasons why one must have a dustbin and so on.

You know, I have passed by King George V Park - I don't know if you have noticed it - but half of the road is sometimes littered with coconuts. The coconut seller sells fresh coconut milk, which is a very good thing. He does a public service. People go there for a walk and there is a nice cool drink available. I am not against it. He is earning a good honest living. He gets coconuts from somewhere. He creates employment for the chaps who climb up for the coconuts, who bring it to markets and he gives joy and pleasure to the young people who go walking through the park. But he will have to learn that he cannot just take the husks and chuck them on the road, interfering with traffic, creating problems. He will be told he has to have a bin there and he will put the husks inside that bin.

First, we must persuade and educate them. Then, those who cannot be persuaded and educated into doing the right thing must be disciplined. And the discipline cannot be on the basis of the old laws because nothing will ever happen. As I have told you, it may be because it is worth their while. You watch High Street. I pass it every day on my way to office. And I know when a boat has come with a delivery because for the next three to four days, piles of straw and wrapping papers and so on, are just thrown away. \$10 fine? Pay the \$10. It is worth it. But if it is a thousand-dollar fine, then it becomes a different proposition.

So, in that second phase, the supervisor plays a role because you are not only going to report 'All my staff are working well', or 'So-and-so has not done his work properly...' and there is a first warning, a second warning, a third warning and then the sack. You will also have to think out ideas.

This is a new situation. Singapore of 20 to 40 years ago and the Singapore of today are two different Singapores. It can never go back to the old Singapore. Before the war, in the 1930s, there were only 700,000 people, about one-third of the population that we have today. It can never go back to that. And in 20 years, it will be an even more different Singapore.

What does it mean? It means that same piece of land or that same drain is being used three times over. In fact, it is more than three times over because the population is not spread evenly throughout Singapore. It has conglomerated, concentrated, in the main city area because everybody wants to live near the big hospitals, the schools, the cinemas, the entertainment places. And, in fact, their use, at a rough guess, I say, has easily gone up five, perhaps seven more times.

Ten years ago, I used to walk at the Princess Elizabeth Walk at the Esplanade. I haven't walked there for some time. But just watching it, I know now that there are at least three times the number of people using it. It is the same walking space. The pressure is on and you have to meet this pressure by new methods and also add capacity to meet the demands.

I will tell you why I have personally taken the trouble over cleansing. It is because I think your standard of public health is the first indicator of the morale and the health of a population. The thing that goes down easiest and quickest and, really, has the most damaging effects is public health. Smells mean mosquitoes, flies, diseases.

If you are old enough and remember the Japanese Occupation, you will know that the first occupation, from being a civilised situation, the whole of Singapore suddenly became a slum with rubbish all over, and flies, disease. And this has happened in many countries that have got their independence. Standards have gone down. We must never allow that here.

You see, in a way, it was easy for the old governors because they were not interested in the persons they had to control.

I give you a simple illustration. In the old days, if you went to Government House, there were no flies, no mosquitoes. It was very simple. The whole area - both the Government House domain and the surrounding area - was cleared: no keeping of pigs, poultry, hawkers and so on. And when you went there, all was nice and clean. Those standards must be kept up. And it is more difficult not only because, as I told you, the population has grown. I mean, even in the last eight years since the last governor left Government House, first, the staff in the grounds have increased their families. As I watch them sometimes in the evening, there are more children now going backwards and forwards than there were eight years ago. There are more human beings using the same facilities. Second, we have not found it within ourselves to deny them keeping the few chickens they want. You know, it is good for them: the little bit of rice left over and chicken, there is some protein for their children and you want that because these are our citizens. They are part of the people we are educating in order to build this healthy, vigorous rugged Singapore. So you want them to get this nutrition.

But we have to educate the parents that they have to keep the chicken coops clean. It is an embarrassment, you know. Sometimes, we have to give an official dinner and somebody has not kept a coop clean and you get flies coming. Then you sit back and ask yourself: Which is the better way? To follow the old system where you have no feeling for the workers on the ground - when they just passed the order that no poultry were to be kept - or to allow them, but to also educate them and say, 'Look you will keep this clean', and if necessary, to discipline them. Having been educated, having been told three times, if they don't do it, then they lose their quarters and out they go.

I have decided we will try to educate them and not stop it because it is right that they should want to improve the nutrition for their children. And it is not difficult to teach them to maintain certain standards.

You know, standards of health and hygiene have nothing to do with wealth. There are wealthy cities in affluent countries, well-developed countries which are quite dirty. They don't really care whether the streets are dirty or not. And there are some very clean cities in some very poor circumstance. You ask any traveller and he will tell you the difference between Hong Kong and Canton. In Hong Kong, there are more wealthy people, more wealth, more money around, but low standards of public conduct. You know, you chuck rubbish, you do all these things. But, on the other side, they have it so organised and there is the social pressure... I mean, you throw an orange peel, a little school boy will walk up to you and all his school friends will surround you and say, 'Please pick that up, it is bad'. It is because of the indoctrination and the social pressure they apply. And one of the most remarkable things that revolution has done is to change the public health aspect, 'out with flies, out with mosquitoes'. They even chased sparrows until those sparrows die! They chase them from field to field.

So, you see, cleanliness has nothing to do with wealth. One of the sad things, of course, is that because of the pressure of learning language, science and many other things, we have stopped teaching children simple hygiene. Many children grow up not knowing how flies and mosquitoes breed. They don't know that if you leave a cigarette tin around, you will get mosquitoes. So, we have to supplement this. That is why we started National Service, the Vigilante Corps, Special Constabulary, the People's Defence Force (PDF), the Army. It is not just to train them. It is to try and make up for what they have missed or what we failed to give them in school because we expanded so rapidly.

There have been large areas of the lives of our young people that have not been looked after and nurtured and tendered as well as they should have been: their standards of civic behaviour, conduct, discipline, moral values.

I went to the Teachers' Training College (TTC) the other day and I saw the teacher demonstrating to me and his teacher-trainee experimental flasks. On top of the flasks, he has put a little wooden slab like the wooden old-fashioned handcuffs and he has locked it at the corner so that you can't pull the flasks out and go home with any of them. I asked, 'What is this for?' And he said, 'Unfortunately, you know, training in civics and ethics in the schools has been so neglected that teacher-trainees who think they want to carry on with their own experiments at home, just bring one flask home rather than go out and buy one. Teacher-trainees! My heart sank! This is happening amongst a group of people who are going to teach children! Where do you go from there?'

Now, I will give you an illustration of what happens when a society is organised.

I was in Japan recently. The things which struck me were the things which are least spoken about in your travel brochures or in the multicoloured magazines. What impressed me was the standard of social discipline.

You know, there are 12 million to 13 million people living cheek by jowl in Tokyo. And the absence of litter and rubbish is remarkable. It is a matter of standards first, of the individual citizen. He just does not throw his lunch packet about.

I walk sometimes on the golf course and these are people with education, supposed to be educated - executives of big firms and so on - and there are cigarette boxes just thrown, littered on the golf course. This is the standard! Our standard! I never saw one single cigarette box on any golf course that I played on in Japan. And there are more people playing there than here.

It has nothing to do with whether you are rich or whether you are poor. It is just your social habit - a sense of responsibility which you nurture, which you inculcate, by persuasion and education and most necessary, discipline and punishment to those who refuse to conform to what are desirable social standards.

You know, you have seen these pictures of Chinese workers wearing white masks. The Japanese do it, too. In fact, the Japanese did it before the Chinese. And you know why they put on this white mask? Because when you have a cold, you are told - and you are told this very early in school - 'Don't go around and pass it to the others in school or in the factory. You will lower productivity'. So, when you have a cold, your social responsibility makes you put on this mask so that you do not cough and sneeze into the other fellow and make him get sick. And you go to any chemist shop in Tokyo and buy a mask. It is quite remarkable, you know. There is no compulsion, there is no law which says, 'You have a cold, you do not have a mask; therefore, you are charged 100 yen'. That is not done. But there are social standards.

You know what I am trying to get at? We have, first of all, to educate our population.

You go to Queen Elizabeth Walk and litter the place with cigarette ash, peel, peanut skins and you have taken away the enjoyability of that place for the next citizen who comes along. You have made it less desirable. You go to Telok Paku, a beautiful stretch of sand, and you see the litter there after Sunday.

This will take a long time, you know, the education process: That you owe this to yourself and to your fellow citizens not to do this, that at the end of the day, you put the remains in a bundle and put this in the litter box. But we can't wait for that, for high standards. So we put the machine to work first. Clean up! Double, treble the cleaning capacity! And we punish the chap who persistently refuses to conform.

Now, I think this is worth doing to succeed. This is a twin campaign we are doing - one is to clean up, keep the place clean, make it cleaner; two is to make the place more beautiful by growing trees and flower shrubs. You see what is being done now outside the Victoria Memorial Hall. The circus has got shrubs and flowers. It is good. It creates

employment. Instead of the chap just getting social welfare relief and feeling ashamed of himself, he is doing something. Fountains, greenery, trees at circuses and other places, and we could make this a garden city within a matter of three years. I think we should do it. I will tell you the advantages to our economy if we do that. First of all, apart from making life more pleasant, you give Singapore a very good reputation, then people come, they stay. Wherever you want to go in the region, you can use this place as a base. Your hotel trade will boom and hotels create employment and you help solve your unemployment problem.

I want this problem of health, maintenance of standards considered in the complex of our present situation. And your old methods are not adequate.

So I hope I have conveyed to you not just the desire, the exhortation, to make the extra effort but also given you a glimpse, a feel of what you have at stake: your own future here and your children's future.

We will develop this very tightly organised, highly disciplined society, educate our young and maintain standards, imbue them with a series of social responsibility and group discipline. Every house, every factory that is built, every machinery that is sunk in the ground may not be yours in the individual sense, but it is ours, you know, collectively. You cannot take, you cannot dismantle the building. It is there! And that is what I want - more factories, more houses.

And we are starting a new scheme. You know that we have already housed all these people. Now, we are planning a second phase - how to sell these houses to them on an instalment basis. In fact, what you want to do is to give it to them to find some way so that they will buy it off you and you then use that money to build more. And they have a stake. You watch the Tiong Bahru flats now. In the old days, how dirty they were. Those of you who work in that area will know how much cleaner they are now because they own them. Now we want to do that throughout Singapore.

Every working chap should have a piece of land at the end, a piece of not land but space, you know - space with a roof, water, light, sanitation. At the end of his career, he should own something which he can pass on. And it can be done, provided the group members, you know, the club members, understand that they have to pull together. On that basis, I think this place will tick. Twenty years from now, there will be greater consolidation. And all this has to do with public morale, the tone of a place, whether a place is proud of itself or it is ashamed of itself when a place is given up.

And I have been to some cities in Asia where there are people who were born on the five-foot way. You know, women gave birth on the five-foot way. And the children grow up and they sleep and die on the streets. It is absolutely true. There are many cities like that.

We do not want that to happen here, and it will not happen as long as your standards are kept up.

I hope you have felt a bit of the flavour of what I think we all should have, if you want this place to prosper and to flourish.

It gave me no pleasure to have to teach the Public Cleansing Workers Union the reason which they had to learn. I wanted to educate them first, to train the leaders, to say, 'Look, you cannot do this. This has got to be done in a proper way; abandon old practices'. In the end, they couldn't. There was too much vested interest, too much racketeering that they had to lose.

But I do not want to just leave it at that. We carry this one step further. I do not want to have to do any of the same unpleasantness on the monthly rated. I will tell you quite frankly: I have told Mr. G. Kandasamy in the Amalgamated Union of Public Employees (AUPE) in no uncertain terms what I expect of, monthly-rated, supervisory staff. And I can win the public argument because Singapore demands this.

You know what is happening now? And this is something, which union leaders have not understood, that the unions as a political force no longer count.

In the old days, with restricted voting, the unions which were mainly English-educated unions and so on were a political force. So I explained to Mr. Suppiah. I said, 'If you do this in the old days, your city councillors and all will be afraid because your members' vote can decide who becomes the city councillor'. But you know, everybody is a citizen now, born and bred here, automatic registration. And more important, union membership should consist of only one-third of the whole working population and the working population is only about 60% of the total electorate.

So I can appeal and I do. You know, I don't do these things by trial and error. I sit down and calculate and I say, 'Well, how do I do this?' The union's vested interests say, 'We cannot give way'. So, I appeal over the heads of the union - the leaders and the men - down to the ground to the voters, that is what the television is for, that is what speech-making is for, that is what the community centres are for, that is what the Citizens' Consultative Committees and the Management Committees are for. These are the ground organisations. So the group pressure, the whole of the citizenry, can bring into line any union or any group interest that gets out of line.

I don't go around 51 constituencies just for fun. It takes a tremendous amount of effort. At the end of it all, you sit down and say, 'Well, all right, how do I organise this group?' Today, in all 51 constituencies - not just the MP and my branch party members who represent only a young section of the population - I can bring together elders of the community and civic leaders numbering 3,000 to 5,000, gather them in the National Theatre and mobilise opinion because they know this is in their group interest. They are all citizens. They have made this their home. Win or lose, good or bad, better keep this.

And, apart from you being a union member, apart from you being a supervisor, you are also a Singaporean. This is yours: the buildings, the roads, the parks, the schools, the community centres - they are yours. And I say we make it work.

And if you have a feel of what I have tried to get across to you, then I say we have not wasted our time. Being a realist, I am prepared to say that even if 95% of you respond, there will be the 5% that may have to be disciplined. Life is like that, you know. Otherwise, how is it that no societies can survive without jails, however good your society? Even the communist states have their special camps. Because there is always the odd chap who says, 'Ah, what is

all this rubbish, wasting my time at 1:30 p.m. and missing my lunch'. But that alone - the punishment, the disciplining of the 5% or even, I hope, 1%, 2%, cannot bring forth that kind of positive response which 95% can make if they feel, 'Yes, this is right, this is mine, you know. At the end of it all, one day I have a place'. And if you have travelled or if you have friends who write to you or visitors who come here, they will tell you that you have really something worthwhile. Nowhere else in Southeast Asia are these standards maintained.

As I said, the first indicator of a lowering of standards and morale is your public health. Your flies, your mosquitoes, once they get out of hand, all standards go down if we don't do our job. One day, when whoever is the prime minister says, 'Come and have dinner at Sri Temasek' - and it is an official dinner - there will be flies with him at the dinner table. Some guests will also feel embarrassed and not know what to do. He will eat and he will be sick.

If we know what is at stake and make that effort now, that can never happen.

Finally, I want to tell you that at the end of six months, we will have another meeting. I will be meeting your officials about three months at a time to review this improved situation. There should then be no householder without a dustbin because we are going to provide him with one and he will pay for it. Shops which persistently litter the street will have to be punished. And eventually, within one year, in 1968, we want this to be a relatively tidy city, not just clean. And it can be done provided we know what is it we must do and why it is worth the effort.

You know, at the end of it all, if you think that what I have said are a lot of very foolish, unnecessary things - why do you worry ...? I mean, cabbage and dust and dirt, it doesn't matter ...' If you feel that, then all this is a waste of time.

Recently, as I told you, I went to Japan. Not only did I see what their standards were but their manufacturers, before this report of theirs was published, said, 'Thank you', at the end of the dinner. All the manufacturers met me, gave me lunch, and they said, 'You will be pleased to know that we have done a survey of all the countries in South and Southeast Asia' - where they have Japanese investments, factories and so on - and they have put this report for Japanese companies and industrialists. And the place that came out best was Singapore. No graft, no corruption, no money to get things passed, you know, having to pay the fire officer for relaxing fire regulations, to pay the health officer for relaxing health regulations, to grease the EDB in order to get an extra benefit. Singapore was number one in the whole area. You read the report. In Thailand, the Thai worker works one-third the efficiency of the Japanese worker, and he is one-third as willing to work. That is what the report says. And more important, they reported that nowhere were the Japanese families living in better conditions than in Singapore.

That report is worth jobs to us. Because every Japanese company knows where their best men want to go when they jockey for transfer. You give them a choice, the chaps each say, 'How about sending me to Singapore?' And there must be health standards because when they come down, they have to bring their children with them.

Thank you, Gentlemen.