

ADDRESS BY THE PRIME MINISTER, MR. LEE KUAN YEW,
AT "USE YOUR HANDS" CAMPAIGN, AT THE NATIONAL
THEATRE ON SATURDAY, 5 JUNE 1976

This campaign to get students, teachers, and principals, to use their hands is a start to reverse the process of the last 8 years, during which we went through a rapid change in social attitudes and life-styles.

If the recession in the past two years had been accompanied by considerable unemployment, this campaign would not have been necessary. When people are jobless and hungry, they are not choosy about job status, comfort and convenience. But we were spared heavy retrenchments and unemployment.

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Attitudes to jobs are formed partly in the schools. As important is the influence of parents, family and neighbours. We have decided to start with the schools. Every child in Singapore goes to school for a minimum of 9 years from the age of six. The attitudes of principals and teachers can influence young minds.

When our economy was expanding, creating more jobs than there were suitable applicants, our citizens had the first choice of jobs. Work permits were issued for vacancies which could not be filled.

The following figures tell us the kind of jobs Singaporeans prefer. There are nearly 150,000 clerical and related workers. Only 2% are work permit holders. There are about 25,000 service workers in the hotel and catering industries. Only 2% are work permit holders. Of 21,000 domestic servants, 21% are work permit holders. Of 5,200 hairdressers and barbers, 40% are work permit holders.

For blue collar jobs, of 27,800 in shipbuilding and repairing, 11% are on work permits; of about 1,600 metal processors, 46% are on work permits; over 4,700 wood workers, 56% on work permits. On building construction, I find the figures of the Ministry of Labour so unsettling, that I have asked for a re-check. Out of 55,000 workers, over 60% are on work permits.

Recently, a Labour Ministry study group interviewed at random 1,700 National Servicemen on ROD. They were young men who have gone through tough training. Over 77% said they did not want jobs in the construction industry, and 55% said they did not want jobs in shipbuilding and repairing, even

though the jobs were well paid. Their reasons were: high physical risks, strenuous work, lack of career prospects, uninteresting work.

The one sector which shows rapid recovery from recession and promise of further growth is tourism, with a growth rate in 1975 of about 8% when the overall GDP growth was 4%. This will accentuate the drift towards comfortable jobs.

This is bad as we have not yet established a solid industrial base, with highly skilled workers.

The next few days of publicity for this campaign will not suddenly change attitudes acquired over many years. But although it may take several years, we must continuously strive to change attitudes to jobs and get our young into those jobs which are important to our economy. The mass media can help in this.

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When our financial centre expanded rapidly, many foreign banks upgraded clerks to book-keepers and accounts clerks to accounting assistants.

Singaporean typists were upgraded as stenographers, as stenos became personal secretaries.

The higher income, resulting from economic growth, led to better clothes and shoes, motor-cycles and cars. Because they had clean and nice clothes, they sought clean and nice jobs. Students were reinforced in these attitudes by a younger generation of teachers. Those who become teachers and what they expect of teaching have changed with the times. There are very few men. Ninety percent of our intake in recent years have been women. They are better dressed and spend more time and money on their clothes and appearance than their predecessors did. This is not a rebuke. It is a statement of fact. As dress styles and spending habits of the community changed, so did those of the younger teachers.

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If Singapore's economic future can depend solely on commerce, finance and servicing, we can afford to leave things be. But prudence tells us that the hard core of workers in all the essential industries must be our own citizens, be it construction, metal processing or shipbuilding and repairing.

There cannot be this disparity of 2% work permit holders for clerical and service jobs, and 60% for construction and metal processing. Even if it takes the next 5-10 years to put this right, we must begin now.

A change in social values and priorities must, of course, be accompanied by adjustments to salaries for the different kinds of work. And our manpower policy must be consciously to improve the quality of the working population. If we have to import workers, then they should preferably be those with better skills and education.

This campaign can only succeed in principals and teachers are seen to be proud to use their hands. Ministers and MPs are also joining to launch this campaign. But after the opening, the teachers and principals must be seen to carry on. This may not be easy. But it is most important for our future. So let us get on with it and keep at it.

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