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EDITED AND COMBINED SPEECHES BY

SENIOR MINISTER LEE KUAN YEW

AT THE SINGAPORE PORT WORKERS' UNION'S

45TH ANNIVERSARY DINNER ON FRIDAY, 11 OCTOBER 1991

AND AT TANJONG PAGAR DAY CELEBRATIONS

AT SILAT CC ON SUNDAY, 13 OCTOBER 1991

I am grateful for the tribute you have rendered me.

We must be clear in our priorities if we want to make progress in the next 20 - 30 years.

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Your advisor, Dr John Chen said that some workers believe the government has become pro-business. I ask: What for? What is the purpose of all this effort and activity, education, campaigns to improve our people, to improve our lives? Can it be to get more businesses of Americans, Japanese, Britishers, Germans, Frechmen, Italians to make more money? Is it not to improve our lives?

We have today's Singapore because we got our fundamentals right. Tonight, I want to talk about fundamentals. The first fundamental is, life means change, because we are living in one of the most spectacular periods of human history when changes come quickly, one after another. The way in which we do things has changed because of science and technology.

For example the PSA. It is still the most important point of entry into Singapore. Without the harbour, we will not be half our selves. We have an airport, but it is not the same. However, the way we use our harbour has changed.

In 1950, one stevedore gang was 37 persons. 1960 the number reduced to 27. 1970, reduced to 15, 1980, reduced to nine. This was because of new machines like fork lift machines. Today it's all machines. This means the worker, instead of just carrying bags, or trundling around goods on trolleys, operates semi-automated computerised equipment like quay cranes and prime movers.

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I visited the PSA three months ago. It's totally different from the Singapore Harbour Board I knew. New computers, new machines, new kinds of ships and containers. There will be more changes in the future. Your younger brothers and your children must be educated to meet this different future.

We have 44 semi-automated quay cranes which handle six million container boxes a year. PSA workers now are better educated. Three-quarters of the workers now have at least one 'O' level. All are computer literate, able to handle touch-screen computer terminals in the cabins of their equipment. Machines work for you. Clerks no longer handle pen and papers.
They sit at the computer terminal, working on PCs or mainframe computers or hand held terminals.

In 10 years, you may be controlling automated-guided vehicles from control rooms, not from the cabins of the cranes.

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Training in 1970 cost PSA $200,000 a year. In 1990 they spent $7 million. They expect to spend more each year to train you for more complicated and complex machines.

Today there are no more daily-rated employees. By 1985, all workers became monthly-rated. The two tables, I and II, show how wages have gone up as the education of workers at the port has gone up because they handle more complex machines:

TABLE I

PROFILE OF PORT OPERATIONAL WORKERS

Year	1970	1980	1990	2000 (expected)
Worker	Cargo Stevedore	Container Port Worker	Container Machine Opr	Equipment Controller
Qualifications	Nil	Primary Education	1 'O' level	3 'O' levels
Skill	Manual	Driving Forklift/ Prime Mover	Operating Container Cranes	Operating Computer - Aided Cranes
Cost of Relevant Equipment	Nil	$131,000	$9 million	$20 million
Productivity (Tonnes Per Man Per Month)	110	642	3,008	7,000 (estimated)
Monthly Salary	$260	$530	$1,900	$3,500 (estimated)

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TABLE II

PROFILE OF PORT TECHNICIAN

Year	1970	1980	1990	2000 (expected)
Worker Qualifications	Fitter Primary Education	Technician 3 'O' levels & NTC 3	Technician 3 'O' levels & NTC 2	Technician 'A' level & National Technical Certificate
Skill	Rudimentary	Electrical or Mechanical Trade	Electrical and Electronics or Electrical and Mechanical Trades	Electrical, Electronic and Mechanical Trades
Average Monthly Salary	$290	$850	$1,900	$3,500 (estimated)

Has the government become less pro-workers? A government that has upgraded their education to improve their incomes? We have changed our economy and with it our way of life.

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Management has learnt that they need the cooperation of workers in order to get high productivity. We should not be caught in a trap, like the British, unions versus their employers, with endless squabbles. Neither side gains. Every now and again the British growth-rate slips. Every time the economy looks like going up, something happens, like inflation, because productivity is not

going up. So they slip back again, because worker productivity is not high. Unions do not cooperate with management.

We slipped only once in ’85. Why? Because we overpaid our workers through too high NWC recommendations. Why did we overpay our workers? Because we wanted management to automate, so the NWC gave our workers the maximum expected benefits and recommended the increases. We were still taking in work permit holders in ’84. So I supported the increase in wages. Unfortunately our wages went too high compared to Hong Kong, Taiwan, Korea. So manufacturers and businessmen switched their orders to these three countries and we had the recession.

We are competing against other countries which are also out to improve the lives of their workers. What then is our limit? It is our productivity, which means how well we produce because of our education, our skills, our organisation, plus the machines that we use, the capital, infrastructure and other assets we have.

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Recently in Kazakhstan, I said that the election results were a healthy development in that it brought back certain basic realities. If you read the Chinese press, you will understand why the Chinese-educated are unhappy.

They feel sidelined because Singapore has become too English speaking and the English speaking are getting all the prominence and attention. They also feel that there is not enough space for them at the top of organisations.

I feel for them. I have high regard for them. They made a great contribution to our success because of their fighting qualities, stamina and hard work, which spring from their Chinese education with its emphasis on Confucian values.

When you showed the video of the old days in the union, I thought to myself, you should have showed that I made my speeches more in Malay and Hokkien. They were very necessary. Now those who are Chinese-educated, even those who've learnt English and can manage, feel deep down in their hearts that they have been sidelined, that they would have done better if they had learnt English first.

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Unfortunately this was the way Singapore's economy developed. We were internationalised, step by step, so that even our Chinese banks switched into English. Our links with the world economy brought this about. The results of the elections will not change this trend in Singapore and the world. But we

can make changes and adjustments to give our Chinese educated more space, more prominence, and more attention.

But let us not make the mistake of repeating these problems in education for the next generation. When I read the Chinese press reporting leaders of clan associations, Chinese teachers union and a committee of Chinese elders who want to promote Chinese culture and education, I worry. Some of their recommendations arise from emotions more than from what is practical educationally. For example, they want the schools to teach written Chinese to the 20 per cent of students who are least academically inclined, when the Education Ministry has proposed to teach only oral Chinese so that these students can have more time and mental space for English.

There is a limit to what a human mind can hold. Very few societies speak two languages. We have to get workers to learn how to operate all this equipment, new technologies, sitting in a control room. We cannot waste their time when they are in school. They have to master mathematics and science. To learn mathematics and science, you have to master the one language in which you are taught mathematics and science.

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Few countries teach two languages from primary one. In Hong Kong they try to teach Chinese and English. They are meeting tremendous problems. There are a few, about 10 per cent, who make both Cantonese and English. The majority speak only Cantonese. They can read English, and write some English. They can't understand spoken English nor speak English because their teachers read the English textbooks to them in Cantonese-English and explain lessons in Cantonese.

Dr Tony Tan went to study the education systems of several industrial countries earlier this year. He and his team of experts studied what these countries do. In Japan, students spend 100 per cent of their time in primary school learning only Japanese. They learn English only in secondary school. In Germany students learn 100 per cent German, to understand what they were taught in science and mathematics. Only in secondary school do they learn a second language.

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Here we teach our children two languages from Primary One. We are saying, "Do this with your left hand, do that with your right hand." It is not easy. Therefore, when we find they cannot cope with two languages, we have to decide which must be the key language, the medium of instruction for mathematics and science.

At the moment, 10 per cent are in the monolingual stream. It is up to parents to decide and they can choose for their children to go to the extended stream, or they stay in the normal stream. The teacher and principal do not decide. They only recommend to the parents. A wrong decision will mean that child will not be able to go into the cabin of a crane to control the video screen, or control the automated prime movers, because he did not grasp his mathematics and science when he was a young boy.

So to those who make these recommendations, I say, please pause and take a deep breath. Remember we are talking about the future of someone else's son or daughter, and we are deciding their earning capacity in 15 years from now.

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The government knowing what parents want has to recommend to parents what is practical and possible for their children. The recommendations of the clan association leaders, Chinese teachers unions and the committee of concerned Chinese elders can be put together into an alternative which they can offer in several schools which they can take over from the Ministry of Education and run as aided schools. Then parents can decide. After a few years it will be

clear which system is better for the student's future. I am prepared to recommend this approach to Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong.

We all want every Singaporean to share in our progress and prosperity. To do that parents have to make choices for their children, sometimes difficult choices. The school teacher and principal must tell the parents, look, your son or daughter can only cope with one language, not two. So you can either choose English plus oral Chinese, or Chinese plus oral English. Of course it is easier for the child to do Chinese plus oral English, because of the home language.

Unfortunately most parents do not want that. Neither the government not the community leaders can force parents to have their children do two languages when they cannot do so. They should be given the choice.

We must be realistic and pragmatic in laying out the path for each and every family to choose the way forward for their children. The government is pro-you, it is pro-workers, it is pro-your children.

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