

Singapore Government

PRESS RELEASE

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ADDRESS BY THE MINISTER FOR LABOUR, MR ONG TENG CHEONG,
AT THE NTUC 1981 MAY DAY RALLY AT THE SINGAPORE CONFERENCE
HALL ON FRIDAY, MAY 1, 1981, AT 10 A.M.

Last year our economy grew by 10.2 per cent despite an unfavourable external economic outlook. This is the first time we have achieved double digit growth since the 1974/75 world recession. More significantly our productivity in terms of real value added per worker rose by five per cent, double that of the previous year. This is an impressive performance. The unions and workers have contributed in no small way to this. They have every reason to be proud of the part they had played.

The future world economic outlook is bleak. In 1980, the developed countries grew by only one per cent. For 1981 these countries are estimated to have an overall growth rate of one per cent, a high inflation rate of 9.75 per cent and 25.5 million unemployed. Pressures for greater protectionism will therefore intensify in these countries. At the same time we are also seeing greater competition for capital and market from other industrialising developing countries. These countries with their abundant labour supply will increasingly be able to produce goods cheaper than us.

We have achieved a standard of living second to Japan in Asia. The challenge to ensure continuous improvements in our standards of living and quality of life in the years ahead amidst a troubled world economy will be more difficult. As a nation without natural resources except its people, the only strategy to ensure a better life ahead for us lies in better development and utilisation of our manpower to support our policy of upgrading to higher value added industries and services. This means that our managers, foremen, supervisors and workers must be trained with the necessary skills and expertise. The government is expanding its public training facilities to turn out more engineers, technicians and skilled workers. Employers are encouraged to take greater advantage of the funds available in the Skills Development Fund and the facilities available in our educational institutions to upgrade the skills and expertise of their workers.

Of vital importance is greater team work between employers, unions and workers. It is true that there is tripartite co-operation between the government, management and labour. But this is more at the national level. What is needed now is greater cooperation between managements, unions and workers at company level. While our unions and employers do not have a confrontational attitude towards each other as in some countries, there is however generally little full hearted cooperation between them. A new working relationship must be forged between managements, unions and workers to work in close partnership for the viability of the company and the growth of the economy. Our effort to raise productivity cannot be fully realised without team spirit between management and workers and among workers themselves.

The key role in the building up of team spirit at the work place must be played by employers. Managements must be prepared to work harmoniously with unions and show greater concern for workers. There must be greater consultation and communication. Unions should not be kept at arm's length but rather rapport and a good working relationship must be developed with them.

We can introduce highly efficient and sophisticated machineries in our offices and factories. But ultimately it is the man behind the machine we have to count on. He has to be motivated to operate these machines well to achieve their maximum efficiency. Importance should therefore be placed on more enlightened management and development of workers. Greater emphasis should therefore be placed on personnel management which should be the concern not just of the personnel department but also of top executives, line managers, foremen and supervisors.

Sound personnel policies must be implemented to foster harmonious labour-management relationship and to motivate workers identify with the company and give of their best. Measures like training, career development, welfare schemes and social and recreational activities would help bind workers to the company. Programmes for encouraging group participation and involvement among their workers in problems concerning their work could also be considered by managements. Managements should show by clear examples that their companies are worth working for and that the

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increased productivity benefits both the company and workers.

Unions and workers on the other hand must respond positively. Unions should support management's programmes to raise productivity. Workers should react by positive work attitudes such as willingness to give of their best, to be trained and to do shift work and overtime. They must feel and understand that the productivity drive is not just for the company's sake but also for their own sake, and that the well-being of their company will also lead to their own well-being.

The task ahead is therefore greater team spirit at the work place and to evolve a new work ethos of which we could be proud. The objective is higher productivity and an upgraded economy to pay higher wages and benefits to all. I am confident we will rise to meet this challenge.
