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**SPEECH BY MR ONG TENG CHEONG, SECOND DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER  
AND SECRETARY-GENERAL, NTUC, AT THE NTUC APPRECIATION DINNER  
AT THE DUXTON PALACE SEAFOOD RESTAURANT, 140 CANTONMENT ROAD  
ON WEDNESDAY, 8 MAY 1985 AT 7.30 PM**

The NTUC has grown from a small group of workers fighting for their basic right to work and live in the early 60s, to the present National Centre for organised labour, influencing and contributing towards nearly every facet of our workers' daily lives. In its early years, it was involved in the struggle for independence, and the struggle against the communist menace. Those were important battles that shaped the destiny of our people. Today the trade union movement is a partner in the task of nation building.

We could not have brought about this transformation without people - men with deep convictions and fired by selfless commitment to improving the lot of their fellow workers.

Tonight we honour some of our veteran comrades, Comrade Peter Vincent, Comrade Eric Cheong and Comrade Alan Tan Hwa Soon. They have served long and well. They have recently stepped down to make way for new blood. Their decisions reflect their selfless and generous nature. I am sure they leave fully satisfied having played their roles in the building of the labour movement.

Besides the three veteran unionists, we also take the opportunity to thank other veteran unionists and NTUC staff who have retired in recent years. They too must have felt a sense of satisfaction for having been involved in the struggles of the labour movement.

One could not have served for so long without growing strong emotional attachments to the labour movement. I am sure all of them would like to see the labour movement growing from strength to strength.

The courage and dedication of our veteran unionists hold lessons for us all. Involvement in the union movement is unlike involvement in an enterprise as an employee. It is more than a job. It is a calling. And like most callings, those called have to be filled with boundless zeal and perseverance for the betterment of their fellow workers' lot in order to succeed. For organised labour to rise to greater heights of achievement in this decade and the next, our younger union leaders must be imbued with the same kind of selfless commitment and dedication to the cause of labour.

Today we have a set of younger leaders. They have the qualities. Their actions will determine the future of the labour movement, the future of our workers. We have brought into the labour movement men who grew up in earlier difficult times, but benefited from our progress because of sound national policies. They want to serve, and help their fellow workers to progress further. They have worked hard among the rank and file. Today they are attuned to the problems and hopes of our workers. They will continue to work with the rank and file, to tackle the many complex problems that face us.

At the same time, we have a set of emerging younger grassroots leaders - natural leaders in their own right. They are able and dedicated. They articulate the hopes and aspirations of our workers. We have appointed some to key positions. More will be involved in the committees which we are forming to carry out the work of the NTUC.

This group of younger leaders will see us through to the 1990's. The challenges facing us are not merely maintaining industrial peace, and seeking closer co-operation with management. These two factors have helped us to do well as a developing country, and as a newly industrialising country (NIC). The next stage will be more difficult. We will be placed not in competition with other developing countries, but with the more advanced NIC's, and even some of the developed nations.

We do not want our workers to continue as slightly better-off second class citizens of this world. We want them to hold their heads high among the ranks of the best. The BERI report already acknowledges that our workers have the attributes. How can we attain the acknowledgement that our workers have the requisite skills for high-tech industries and knowledge-intensive services? How do we acquire a reputation for flexibility, a nimbleness to respond to changing needs?

The process of change is never easy. Our younger set of leaders will have to learn to distinguish short-term pains from long-term problems. Short-term pains if shied away can, in the process, create long-term problems. However, our younger leaders will have to take to heart that a better-educated, more enquiring workforce will require greater participation in the policy making process. They too will need to understand the complex issues.

The beginnings of a new consensus between workers and their younger leaders are already there. I have faith that as fresh problems are faced and overcome, this consensus will be strengthened.

To-night we also honour Dr Tony Tan who has been the Chairman of the NTUC Investment & Co-operatives Committee since its inception in May 1979. He is a very hardworking Chairman, holding regular monthly meetings to look into the accounts and performance report of the NTUC co-operatives, union co-operatives and the companies owned by the Singapore Labour Foundation. He meets with the Directors and management of the co-operatives and companies regularly. I am sure they have found Dr Tan's counsel useful.

Through Dr Tan's efforts and advice over these years, many of our co-operatives, unions and companies have rationalised their operations and investments. The labour movement as a whole has benefited a great deal from his involvement.

Dr Tan has decided to step down from the Chairmanship of the NTUC Investment & Co-operatives Committee. We feel a sense of loss of a good counsellor in investment. On behalf of the labour movement, I thank him, and hope that he will continue to give us advice in a different capacity when we need it.

We also wish to take this opportunity to thank all those who helped in our recent Triennial Delegates Conference, the May Day rally and Carnival. Many of you will continue to be involved in the organisation of other May Day celebration activities during the course of this month. It is a team effort. Everybody counts. We are grateful to you for your dedication and assistance. I want you to know that we very much appreciate your effort and what you have done. Thank you.

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