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ADDRESS BY MR. SIA KAH HUI, MINISTER OF STATE (LABOUR)
TO THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING OF THE CONSUMERS' ASSOCIATION OF SINGAPORE (CASE) AT THE TRADE UNION HOUSE,
SHEPPHON WAY, ON SATURDAY, JUNE 25, 1977 AT 2.30 P.M.

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Consumer protection in the form of organisation of consumers is meaningful and worthy of attention only after the fundamental problems of employment and other basic needs have been more or less solved. In the 60's we were successful in our economic development and developed the Republic into a manufacturing, financial and services centre. We enjoy a standard of living in Asia second only to Japan. It was therefore appropriate that our efforts then turn to matters like consumer protection. On August 11, 1971 the National Trades Union Congress (NTUC) founded the Consumers' Association of Singapore (CASE). Consumerism in this sense is therefore of recent origin in Singapore.

Protecting consumers against the harsh effects of world inflation in the early 70's is one of the solid social achievements of the Republic. With 100.0 in November 1972 as the base, the Consumer Price Index rose to 117.7 in 1973, 144.0 in 1974 and 147.7 in 1975 and then dropped to 144.9 in 1976. The Government measures to prevent profiteering and NTUC's contributions in the form of the establishment of consumer co-operatives like Welcome and Fairdeal help moderate the adverse effects of these inflationary pressures. Inflation has now moderated and co-operative supermarkets is very much a part of the life of the Singapore consumer. The provision

of facilities for the sale of foodstuffs at reasonable prices must be continued since our Republic is dependent on imports for nearly all its foodstuffs.

CASE in the short period of less than six years has also contributed to the protection of the consumer. One of its major achievements is that it has become an organisation consumers turn to when they have complaints against shops or companies from which they have bought goods or turn to for services. The Association has a consumer education programme. It has founded the Advertising Standards Authority of Singapore (ASAS) as an advisory council to CASE to protect consumers against malpractices in advertising. The Association has also embarked modestly into the field of consumer testing and research.

The key to consumer protection must be self-help by the consumer himself. An informed and discerning consumer prepared to stand for his rights is an essential ingredient in any programme to ensure that shops and companies will not try to indulge in malpractices. Undoubtedly consumer consciousness has increased over the last few years as a result of the activities of CASE. More consumer education will be needed to educate and inform the consumer. He must be made aware of his rights under legislation, of the pitfalls that exist in buying goods and services on cash or on hire purchase, of particular problems connected with buying certain

products or services and of the comparative value of similar products offered under different brands. I am therefore pleased that CASE is devoting considerable attention to consumer education.

There is no doubt that CASE has to continue its role of a watchdog organisation for consumers. Its assistance to consumers who have not been successful in obtaining redress for malpractices from companies should be carried on. It should continue to focus its attention on areas of important consumer expenditure where standards of quality, pricing or service are poor and seek to improve them in co-operation with the relevant trade associations. CASE has been fairly successful in introducing self-regulation in advertising through its advisory council ASAS. There is potential for development of such self-regulation in other areas and no doubt CASE is constantly on the look-out not only to consolidate but also to increase its sphere of activities.

CASE has been able to survive financially through the help of the Government and NTUC. The initial Government grant to CASE was \$25,000/-; in 1975 it was \$30,000/-; 1976 \$35,000/- and for this year \$30,000/-. More financial and moral support must be given by consumers. Consumer membership of the Association has still to grow in adequate numbers. Many cease to join once their problems have been dealt with. Consumers should not view the Association as

just solving their own immediate problems. Rather, they should see it as a social organisation worthy of their continuous support for the achievement of their interest as consumers. The Central Committee of CASE will want to seek ways and means of ensuring that this support by consumers and other well wishers will be more forthcoming in the days ahead.

May I conclude by extending my congratulations to CASE for what it has achieved and wish the Association greater success in the years ahead.