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HC.NOV.32/77 (LABOUR)

26 NOV 1977

TEXT OF SPEECH BY THE MINISTER OF STATE FOR LABOUR, MR.
SIA KAH HUI, AT THE 13TH ANNIVERSARY DINNER AND DANCE OF
THE FOOD, DRINKS AND ALLIED WORKERS' UNION AT THE NETTUNE
THEATRE RESTAURANT ON SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 20, 1977 AT 8 P.M.

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This is the second occasion I am joining you in your anniversary dinner and dance - the first occasion being your eighth anniversary celebrations on November 28, 1972, at the then Hotel Malaysia. Many of you would recall that I also spoke to you on the opening of your courtesy campaign week at Mandarin Hotel on August 16, 1973. I had not since then come across any serious allegations of discourtesy on the part of union members. I take it that this is a case of "no news is good news". Human nature being what it is we must admit that to lavish praise on others does not come easily to most people whilst it requires no prompting nor great effort to open up your guns on others. So on this basis your courtesy campaign must have borne fruit. And again because of human nature special effort is required to keep on smiling and be courteous whilst no effort is needed to "yap-yap" so a campaign especially a courtesy campaign is never over. It can never end. It needs "self-campaign" every minute of the day.

Now let us get back to the immediate present. May I thank you for inviting me and my wife to this your 13th anniversary and to present awards to union officials who have held office for more than six continuous years in the Executive Council or Branch Committee. It is one of life's pleasures to be with happy people, so we are happy indeed to join you in this joyous occasion.

The FDUU has expanded from a small initial membership of 1,010 to 10,169; a ten-fold increase over a short period

of 13 years. Today it has firmly established itself as one of the larger and more successful unions in the Republic. The remarkable growth in the membership is a clear indication of the trust and confidence workers in the hotel and catering industry have in the union and its leadership. I have no doubt that the union will nurture this support given by its members and the managements and seek to always further the whole interests of the industry.

The world economy has become increasingly difficult. The major industrialised nations continue to be troubled by inflation and economic sluggishness and massive unemployment. Thus there has been more intense competition and rivalry from other Asian countries for the existing travel markets of the Western industrialised nations, on the one hand. On the other hand, inflation and rising air fares have escalated the costs of travel today though there are signs that special low air fares in certain sectors are coming into operation. To counteract the ill effects of these developments on our tourist industry, Government through the Tourist Promotion Board has further intensified its overseas marketing and promotional efforts in the new markets of Europe, Asia and America. Special efforts have been made to promote intra-Asia and inter-ASEAN travel and to establish Singapore as a distribution point for tourists to South East Asia. On the domestic front, the Board is also improving and upgrading tourist facilities and services. The Board has also stepped up its promotional programme to induce visiting tourists to extend their length of stay in Singapore. Just a few days ago the Minister for Finance said that more

facilities are being planned for improved air services, telecommunication, hotel convention and other tourist facilities in order that Singapore would become the ideal convention centre in this part of the world. So, you see all parties concerned are going all out to ensure the continued growth in the tourist industry.

In a basically service-orientated industry such as the tourist trade, the role played by the workers is of paramount importance. Advertising, publicity campaigns and other promotion gimmicks are important in attracting tourists to visit Singapore for the first time. Whilst we may have the best facilities and the most beautiful hotels, the question whether people will come again or recommend their friends to visit Singapore will be largely dependent on the treatment they receive during their stay here. This fact can never be over emphasised. There is a great need, therefore, for all workers in the industry not only to maintain but also to enhance the quality and competitive costs of their services. Workers must never cease to strive to improve their skills and expertise and to increase their output. In particular, service personnel in the hotel trade should at all times maintain a code of personal conduct that is above reproach when dealing with the guest visitors.

Upgrading of workers' output and efficiency must, ultimately, rest on effective management and adequate training of personnel. Management must make determined efforts to provide suitable environment and means whereby the raising

of workers' productivity is possible. They should seek ways and means to maximise their resources both in terms of materials and manpower, and to minimise wastage. Schemes to improve workers' standard of service and efficiency will have to be worked out, implemented and results achieved before productivity incentive schemes are drawn up. The fruits of higher productivity must be fairly shared between employers and workers. In this regard, I am glad to note that your Union and the Yaohan management have worked out and implemented a productivity incentive scheme in the Yaohan departmental store and that the scheme is presently working satisfactorily and is achieving some measure of success.

It is heartening to know also that your Union, through its productivity committee, has been actively promoting the concept of higher productivity amongst members at the Branch level with the objective of establishing productivity schemes with management in all the establishments where the Union is represented.

As far as feasible, wage increases must be tied up with higher productivity. It is the responsibility of union leaders to drive home to their members the necessity to exercise moderation when making demands for wage increases and fringe benefits and to learn to place national interests over individual and sectional interests.

The FDAWU in its past 13 years of existence has done a great deal to improve the well-being of its members through

a variety of social and welfare programmes. I am told that your Union has in January this year initiated a scholarship scheme for the children of members. Under this scheme, scholarships are annually awarded to primary, secondary and pre-university pupils. I also understand that a multi-purpose catering co-operative, to be subscribed by members only, has been successfully registered and that it would be ready for operation early next year. I believe your Union has plans for the setting up of a kindergarten for the benefit of members' children.

These things no doubt the Union must do. But more important than this and a fact which is often forgotten or pushed to the background, is what the Union can do to ensure the continued prosperity and well-being of the industry in which its members earn their bread and butter. Unless the industry, in this case the tourist industry, prospers the Union will not prosper. If the industry is doing well and expanding the Union membership will increase and the Union will be strong and in a position to do a lot of good for its members. So I would say the primary task of the Union is to be the lubricant (so much better if it can be the driving force) that keeps the industry's machinery move on smoothly and gaining speed all the time. It should never allow itself to be used as a haven for the shirker and the irresponsible. No doubt the Union is there to see that the workers get a just and fair deal. In fact this is how unions first began. Remembering that managements are run by men and women,

naturally one of the tasks of the Union is to protect its members from exploitation. This no doubt the Union will have to go on doing. What I want to stress is that unions can only gain the respect of management and the community at large if the leadership put the interests of the industry in which it serves first and the interests of the nation as a whole above all else. In other words the leadership must be far sighted and should never sacrifice long term interests for some temporary and immediate gains.

Well, ladies and gentlemen thank you for being so patient. I must confess that being a school master by profession, I suppose whenever an opportunity is given one would show up one's true colours.

Thank you for giving me your ears.

Happy Anniversary.