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SPEECH BY THE MINISTER OF STATE FOR LABOUR, MR. SIA KAH HUI, AT THE YMCA'S 76TH ANNIVERSARY DINNER AND DANCE AT THE DRAGON PALACE RESTAURANT, COCKPIT HOTEL, ON SATURDAY, JULY 29, 1978 AT 8 P.M.

It is with great pleasure that my wife and I have accepted your invitation to join you in celebrating the 76th anniversary of the YMCA. From its modest beginnings in 1902, the YMCA has developed over the past three-quarters of a century into one of the major youth organisations in Singapore with a membership of some 2,700 persons and with programmes and activities catering for about 5,000 persons.

Our urban society has undergone rapid transformation. Economic and social developments have brought major changes in our way of life. Many have lauded us for our multi-racial and multi-religious life and our success in giving housing to our people and a standard of living second only to Japan in Asia. Yet some have portrayed us, however unfairly, as an ugly lot: materialistic, self-centred, ill-mannered, callous and complacent. Whatever the truth may be it is up to the leaders and the more enlightened of our people to regularly take stock, to ponder and reflect on the type of society we want to create and the type of people to live in it.

We have progressed quite far economically, yet the basic requirements of our economic situation remain. As a small island nation, without natural resources or an agricultural sector to fall back on, there can be no slow down in our economic development. This is made more urgent by the sluggish and uncertain economic recovery of the industrial West, the major source of our foreign investments and the principal market of our products. Young entrants to the labour market who have no experience of the massive unemployment of the late 50's and early 60's must know that without natural resources our manpower is crucial to our economic development and that therefore we have to maximise its contribution. Hard work, a fair day's work in return for a fair day's wage, giving of one's best, perseverance and willingness to upgrade

one's skills2/-

one's skills must be part of our work ethos. We cannot afford bad work habits, whether it is job-hopping for a few dollars, impatience to move up without the necessary experience and training, or preference for soft jobs.

On the social side, our achievement-oriented and meritocratic society has produced some Singaporeans who regard monetary gain and personal ambition the be-all and end-all of existence. They only care for themselves and their families. As a nation and a community we must see beyond our family circles and be concerned for the society at large. As the Chinese saying goes, if there is no country then there is no family. If the country goes to the dogs where is the family. It is of paramount importance therefore that we contribute, each one in his own way, to programmes for the good of the community and the country at large.

We also have some social problems like drug taking among our youths. From the date of the implementation of Operation Ferret in April 1977 to the end of June this year, 10,499 or almost 88 per cent of the 11,973 cases detected as having taken drugs were below 30 years of age. This, to say the least, is not a healthy situation. Constructive use of leisure seems to be absent among some of our young who hop from one shopping centre to another or from one coffee house to another.

We are a young nation with about 63.9 per cent of our population below 30 years of age as estimated in mid 1977. It is therefore very important that proper emphasis be given to the spiritual, mental and physical development of our young people to ensure that these social problems are minimised, if they cannot be avoided altogether.

The YMCA has a role to play in this regard since it is a major youth organisation with "the spiritual, intellectual, social and physical well-being of young people" as one of its main objects. Having looked through its publications may I commend the YMCA for having a wide range of programmes and activities for our youths.

There is great need for the YMCA to continue its work of influencing the attitudes and values of our young. One area is the development of the moral and spiritual strength of our young to deal

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with the pressures of life in a fast-moving urban society, the onslaught of a materialistic outlook and the undersirable influence of a permissive philosophy emanating from the West.

Our youths have to learn to develop a sense of involvement in whatever activity they may be engaged in. They should, for example, be totally involved in their work in that they should develop dedication, competence and efficiency in what they do. Likewise, they should develop a sense of concern for other people, which may be manifested in friendship, sensitivity, respect and compassion for others. The development of a sense of commitment to the community and the nation needs to be cultivated and emphasised again and again.

The association provides wholesome and enriching outlets for the exuberance and energies of our youths. Physical education and recreational programmes, fine arts activities and community service work are being organised. Our youths are being taught to develop hobbies and have wide interests. If they do this well and are involved and committed to our society, they are more likely to lead a socially balanced and emotionally satisfying life.

Since our society is undergoing rapid changes there is need for the association to regularly reappraise its programmes in order to make them more relevant and meaningful for the participants. The programmes have to be innovative, responsive and sufficiently comprehensive to meet the spiritual, educational, social and physical needs of the young. Programmes have to be geared towards meaningful, constructive endeavours, capable of sustaining the continuing interest and participation of our youths. I note with interest that the association had conducted a pilot project in Ang Mo Kio New Town and is planning two projects, one for Bedok and the other for Woodlands, as part of its search to see how it can better serve our youth in large housing estates. This shows the association's awareness of the need to ensure that its activities continue to be relevant to our society.

In conclusion, may I take this opportunity to commend your organisation for its past performance and wish you every success in the coming years.
