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SPEECH BY DR WONG KWEI CHEONG, MINISTER OF STATE (LABOUR) AND
CHAIRMAN, NATIONAL PRODUCTIVITY BOARD, AT THE LUNCH MEETING OF
THE ROTARY CLUB OF QUEENSTOWN AT THE OBEROI IMPERIAL HOTEL ON
MONDAY 14 DECEMBER 1981 AT 1.30 PM

Introduction

Rotarians assemble together to help the community. From the list of activities that you have undertaken, it would appear that you have done extremely well for the unfortunates and the aged. Perhaps for the 80's you may wish to enlarge your activities to help the Nation. One such issue which you can assist is in the area of promotion of higher productivity.

The Need for Productivity Improvement

In the seventies, we were able to react to the oil crisis and recession much better than most Organisation of Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries. Our economy managed to grow at an average rate of 9.4 per cent during this period.

The 80's put us in a more difficult position. The worldwide unemployment figures are frightening - 3.0 million in UK, 7.5 million in USA, and 1.4 million in Germany. We cannot escape from the world economic backlash. We therefore need to prepare ourselves well for the future.

As a small country with no natural resources, we need to use our human resources wisely. We should take advantage of our present domestic labour shortage to upgrade ourselves. Continued dependence on foreign workers to meet this shortage will only serve to retard our economic progress. We aim to increase our annual labour productivity by 6 - 8 per cent in order to realise our GDP growth target of 8 - 10 per cent per annum during this decade. How can this be achieved?

Committee on Productivity

First, we must spread the concept of productivity to all sectors of the population. The concept of productivity as the Prime Minister explains,

is "to get more out of a workforce with the same working hours".

In April this year, a Committee on Productivity (COP) was formed to map out strategies and plans for productivity improvement. The Committee deliberated on ways to improve work attitudes, productivity and labour-management relations in Singapore. Its recommendations are contained in a report which has been published in our four official languages and are available free from National Productivity Board. The media have given wide coverage to the report. Employer organisations and NTUC have reacted to the recommendations as well.

We are pleased to present each of you a copy for your comments.

National Productivity Council

One of the crucial recommendations of the Report, namely the formation of a National Productivity Council, has already been implemented. The Council is now responsible for implementing the COP recommendations. It is therefore entrusted to launch the Productivity Movement in Singapore.

The Council aims to inculcate the concept of productivity in the whole population through the Productivity Movement. It is right now identifying the problem areas and working out specific recommendations for the Productivity Movement. It would be a great achievement if the productivity concept could be inculcated into our people in seven to 10 years' time. If we can get the productivity message through to the core workers in three to five years, there will certainly be marked improvements in our productivity.

Training

Productivity promotion creates awareness among our people of the need for productivity improvement. It paves the way for the creation of a productive workforce. But to realise our productivity growth target of 6 - 8 per cent per annum in the 80's, the quality of our workers must be upgraded.

The National Productivity Board is playing a major role in this upgrading process. The Board has already revamped its training programmes to place greater emphasis on human resource development. The Board offers courses on Quality Control Circles, Performance Appraisal, Personnel Management, Supervisory Development, Effective Communication, and other human management programmes for all levels of workers from senior managers

down to supervisors and line workers. I sincerely hope you will make use of these training facilities to upgrade your workers.

Conclusions

How can Rotarians contribute to our Productivity Movement? First you must yourself be convinced of its importance for our economic growth in the '80s.

Then let 'Productivity' be selected as your theme for a rotary year.

Help us to convey the productivity message to your workers, your unions and your managements. This is the best way to ensure our economic growth.
