

Singapore Government PRESS RELEASE

Information Division, Ministry of Culture, City Hall, Singapore 0617 • TEL: 3378191 ext. 352, 353, 354 / 3362207 / 3362271

Archives & Oral History Department
Singapore

22 OCT 1982

12-2/82/10/19.

Acc No.

NARC

f2 0DB8

84

SPEECH BY DR WONG KWEI CHEONG, MINISTER OF STATE (LABOUR) AND
CHAIRMAN, NATIONAL PRODUCTIVITY BOARD (NPB), AT THE SEMINAR ON
"THE DEVELOPMENT OF WORK VALUES - THE EMPLOYERS' CONTRIBUTION"
AT THE SHANGRI-LA HOTEL ON TUESDAY, 19 OCTOBER '82 AT 8.45 AM

Automated Equipment

The success of the productivity movement depends very much on the support of our workers and employers. The government can only prepare the social environment and try to inculcate good work attitudes through active promotion. Today, the concept of productivity has penetrated into the minds of most workers. They are aware of the need to increase productivity. But how to increase productivity? This is the question asked by many workers. This is a question that is best answered by employers.

Employers can increase productivity through automation and mechanisation. Of course, they will have to send their workers for training in order to operate the new machines. Ordering new automated equipment means additional capital investments. This is relatively simple operation for most employers. In fact, many employers have already done so.

However, many companies still suffer business failures despite heavy investments in new automated equipment. Let us look at the airline industry. Many of you would have travelled by SIA, our national airlines. The SIA service has already established an international image. SIA flights are usually full and seated with satisfied customers. In fact, although many other international airlines are adversely affected by the current recession, SIA is still operating profitably.

Working Environment

What is the SIA secret for success? The secret lies in the emphasis placed by SIA on the human aspects of management. The SIA smile goes with every SIA service. The SIA service is the result

of long hours of training. In addition to in-house training facilities, SIA also sends its staff to external training institutes. In fact, NPB has trained about 145 SIA staff on performance appraisal systems and a further 120 SIA staff have attended NPB QCC courses and seminars. SIA personnel has also attended several of the NPB courses on management and supervisory training.

The development of good human relationships leads to a better working environment. After all, if good labour-management relationships are actively fostered by the company, the workplace atmosphere changes. Courtesy begets courtesy. Efficiency follows. Productivity increases.

SIA owes its success not just to the buying of new aircrafts and new automated equipment. Other airlines can also make similar capital investments. SIA goes one step further - it takes steps to upgrade the working environment. This has paid rich dividends. The working environment can mainly be upgraded by better management, training and a conscious effort to develop teamwork and good human relationships.

NTS Workers

In the final analysis, productivity increases depend very much on the support of employers. Employers hold the key. Gone are the days when Singapore labour was cheap. Employers have also been informed that they should not rely on foreign workers from the non-traditional sources (NTS) as an alternative source of cheap labour. We have seen the social problems arising from immigrant labour - West Indians in Britain, Africans in France and Turks in West Germany. Singapore is too small a country to be landed with such problems.

The Government has already announced the policy of building up a wholly Singaporean workforce by 1992. Workers from non-traditional sources (NTS) will be completely phased out by the end of 1984, except for domestic help and those employed in the construction and shipbuilding and repairing industries. This policy of building up a wholly Singaporean workforce has been actively discussed by members of the National Productivity Council. Opinions vary. Many employers especially the Japanese, are

supportive of this policy. This is not surprising, as Japan does not rely on immigrant workers. Japan has a highly productive and homogeneous workforce.

There are however employers who argue that some NTS workers act as pace-setters. These workers have suffered hardships in their home countries. They work diligently, and send as much money as possible back home to their families. Such employers have therefore appealed for an extension of the work permits of these NTS workers. This appeal was also brought to the attention of our Prime Minister when he met employers' representatives on 11 August 1982.

The Government has reviewed this policy and is prepared to consider extending for 12 to 24 months the use of NTS workers up to five per cent of a company's workforce, subject to a ceiling of 50 NTS workers. However, the company must ensure that, before end March 1984, it has proof that new automated equipment has been ordered, and that it is upgrading the working environment so that it can carry on without the NTS workers after the 12 to 24 months of extension. Details of this policy are being worked out and will be announced in due course.

Conclusion

Singapore has limited resources; our greatest assets are our human resources - our workforce. Our economic progress in the eighties depends on how well we develop this into a highly productive workforce. Employers have an important role to play in this development. We are pleased to note that the Singapore National Employers Federation (SNEF) recognises this important role. This seminar on the employers' contribution to the development of work values is therefore most appropriate.

I wish you success in your deliberations. On this note, it is my pleasure to declare the seminar open.