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SPEECH BY DR WAN SOON BEE, MINISTER OF STATE, PRIME
MINISTER'S OFFICE, AT THE LAUNCHING OF UNION OF TELECOMS
EMPLOYEES OF SINGAPORE (UTES) MEMBERSHIP CAMPAIGN AND
CHECK-OFF RENEWAL EXERCISE 1985 AT TELECOMS KAMPONG AMPAT
COMPLEX ON SATURDAY, 2 NOV 1985 AT 9.00 AM

I am happy to be with you today to launch your membership campaign and check-off renewal exercise.

The Union of Telecoms Employees of Singapore already enjoys an 80 per cent membership strength of bargainable staff in Telecoms and yet your Union is stepping up its membership drive. This is a step in the right direction and I am glad that your leaders have not decided to sit back and view a membership campaign as unnecessary for a union which is already enjoying substantial membership strength.

A union must be strong to be credible. And strength lies both in numbers and in the quality of the leaders and members.

We are not talking about strength to fight and bully others by our sheer muscle power. But we are interested in the strength that gives us the resources to provide better benefits and services to our members and to perform better as a trade union. This in return helps us to gain better respect and credibility from all those with whom we have to deal with.

Singapore enjoyed good economic growth in the past years and there was a near full employment situation. With such a tight labour situation, workers tended to be choosy and lost track of the important role trade unions played in the past to bring about a peaceful environment that brought about prosperity and wealth.

Workers became over confident in their own ability and viewed trade unions as irrelevant. Such misconceptions are painfully realised when things turn for the worse. We have seen recently a spate of retrenchments and also what some employers are capable of doing when times are bad. Non-unionised workers especially have suffered the most, as they have been left to fend for themselves when profits dipped and the companies were wound up.

On the other hand, we have seen how workers in unionised establishments were treated more decently and compensated adequately.

We have to keep on reminding ourselves that in a changing world with changing business and economic conditions we must be ever mindful of the need to change and adapt. We have to be prepared for any eventuality.

The security and benefits provided by a trade union should therefore never be taken for granted.

We should all endeavour to drive home this point both to our existing members and those who are yet to join our fold.

The strength of each union and the combined strength of the entire labour movement do matter in the long run and we have to ensure that both workers and employers realise this.

I would therefore urge each one of you to play your part in strengthening your Union and the labour movement so that the trade union movement continues to be relevant and purposeful in bringing about a better standard of living for everybody.

On this note, I am happy to launch your membership campaign and check-off renewal exercise and wish you every success in your efforts in serving your fellow workers and your country. #####