

File 0 N-RC  
83 0008 26

# 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

AMENDED COPY

10 JUN 1983

Release No: 4/JUN  
12-3/83/06/03

**SPEECH BY MR EUGENE YAP GIAU CHENG, PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARY,  
LABOUR, AT THE 69TH SESSION OF THE INTERNATIONAL LABOUR  
CONFERENCE IN GENEVA ON 3 JUNE 1983**

---

Mr President, on behalf of the delegation from Singapore, I would like to extend my congratulations on your election to the Presidency of this Conference. Under your wise and capable leadership, I am confident that the Conference will produce fruitful results.

The problems of child labour have been effectively highlighted by the Director-General in his report to the Conference. The sight of children at work evokes a sense of pity. However, it is most detestable to note that there are some employers who would have no compunction to exploit these children for the employers' selfish economic gains.

The Director-General has quite rightly pinpointed the root cause of child labour on poverty. Children work because their families need the extra income to supplement the families' meagre earnings. The least that Governments could do is to provide adequate protection for child workers and enforce strictly laws and regulations to prevent exploitation of child labour.

While the problems of child labour are of concern to many countries, a more pressing problem confronts all of us. I am referring to the issue of employment. This issue is also related to the problems of child labour. By adopting policies aimed at promoting adult employment and raising their income levels, the need for children to work will be eliminated.

Unfortunately, the prospects of employment are not so bright. Overall world trade declined two per cent by volume in 1982 and the global recession has left more than 30 million people unemployed in the OECD countries. The forecast is that OECD unemployment will increase to about 34 million this year. There are some indications of a turnaround in the world economy. But it remains to be seen whether the recovery can be sustained.

Faced with high rates of unemployment, the natural tendency of the affected countries is to adopt protectionist measures in the hope of protecting jobs at home. Considering the existing and varied measures aimed at limiting free trade, it would appear that Governments are adept at creating new schemes to curb imports. If the same ingenuity could be applied to solve the unemployment problems on the home front without restricting free trade, the global economy would be in a better shape.

Protectionism is a double-edged sword. It will not create jobs. When a country imports less, the exporting countries affected by this action would do likewise to the exports of the initiator. As a result, jobs in its export industries would be at stake.

Promotion of full, productive and freely chosen employment presupposes the availability of employment opportunities and financial resources to implement job creation schemes. Unfortunately, the number of jobs are contracting as more and more workers are laid off as a result of the recession and shrinking markets for export-oriented industries. The increasing debt problem of less developed countries is also exerting a deleterious effect on domestic employment. Foreign exchange earnings which are badly needed to stimulate employment are being diverted to repay interest on loans. In some cases, the repayment is insufficient to service the interest payments.

The International Labour Organisation (ILO) has made significant contributions in the areas of labour standards and employment promotion. It is hoped that the Organisation would now devote its attention to help check the high global unemployment rate. The task will not be formidable, considering the vast resources and expertise that the ILO can muster to undertake the assignment.

International labour standards would have more relevance if more people can obtain gainful employment. For, unless the basic necessities are first satisfied, any hope of meeting the international labour standards would be unattainable.

- - - - -