



**SINGAPOREANS FIRST**

国人为先 WARGA DIUTAMAKAN சிங்கப்பூரர்களுக்கு முதன்மை

**(The above logo and party name are subject to approval by Registry of Societies)**

## **MANIFESTO**

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*25 May 2014*

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### **Fair Society, Strong Families and Esteemed People**

People are important. They are the soul of a nation. For the past 50 years, Singaporeans have become secondary to the relentless pursuit of economic growth. The nation has lost its soul. We need a new vision that puts Singaporeans at the heart of the nation. The vision of a fair society with strong families and a confident people with high self-esteem. The vision of ***Singaporeans First***.

#### **A Fair Society**

In a fair society, every Singaporean will have the best possible chance to succeed in his chosen field and no Singaporean will be left behind if he fails to do so. We believe in a system of differential rewards based on merit, talent and hard work. At the same time, we are also committed to ensuring that the basic needs of jobs, healthcare, education, housing and transport are met.

The elitist policies of the PAP have turned Singapore into a highly divided society with extreme inequalities of wealth and income between the rich and the poor and a shrinking middle class squeezed in between. Singapore has now become the most costly city in the world. Singapore citizens are faced with expensive housing options, high healthcare costs, unreliable and expensive public transport, and a system of education that encourages families to supplement school curriculum with private tuition at great expense. Meanwhile real wages have fallen or virtually stagnated for large groups of Singaporeans, making it difficult for many families to cope.

***Singaporeans First*** will remake society with policies that turn us into masters, not slaves, of economic growth. We will always put the interests and well-being of people first before the pursuit of economic growth. We will create a fair society with new policies to rejuvenate the economy and generate good jobs that pay fair living wages. At the same time, we will strengthen welfare services comprehensively and significantly in healthcare, education, housing and transport. Our current tax regime is highly regressive with low corporate and personal income taxes on the one hand, and high indirect taxes on the other. A progressive tax system is more equitable and fair as it will allow the better off to repay, through higher taxes, benefits received from others. However we do not envisage any need for it in at least the next ten years even when we increase social spending substantially. Instead we will make



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our tax system less regressive by removing the Goods and Services Tax. The GST imposes an unfair burden on middle and lower income Singaporeans as it raises their basic cost of living significantly. We do not see the need to impose new taxes in other areas to make up for the loss of the GST revenue.

### The Economy

We will transform the economy to make better use of our limited resources of land and people. After 50 years of high dependence on multinational corporations and foreign labour, it is time that we "grow our own timber" by developing our own talent pool of local entrepreneurs, managers, professionals, engineers, technical specialists and skilled workers.

We will restructure the economy by making it much less dependent on cheap low-skilled foreign labour as it depresses our wage levels, lowers overall productivity, sustains low skill industries and adds to over-crowding. We will review the need to give very favourable foreign worker quotas to certain industries that are highly dependent on foreign workers; this special treatment is unfair to other industries and distorts our manpower policies. For example, shipyards employ 100,000 foreign workers out of a total workforce of 120,000. We should also question the desirability of promoting industries that harm social mores and destroy families. Are casinos worth the price in terms of costs to society and families? They also depend significantly on low skilled foreign labour in the entertainment and food & beverage sectors. They may contribute to the GDP but do not add to our social advancement or the development of wholesome skill sets.

We will place high priority on developing our local enterprises, for example, the small and medium enterprises into major regional or global firms. We will aim to provide grants for development capital to these enterprises to help them strike out into new areas especially in the high tech industry. Creative industries will appeal to our young and budding entrepreneurs. Two sectors that are sustainable over the long term are education and healthcare. Our SMEs can develop their expertise in these areas. We should be aggressive in helping them overcome the problem of high business costs by reviewing the sale and rental policy of industrial factories and space. Have our planning and land allocation policies favoured the landlords and building owners such that our rental costs continue to rise unchecked? Has the policy of encouraging ownership of industrial property resulted in high rental?



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Local enterprises must be encouraged to give priority to the employment of Singaporeans across all sectors but particularly at PMET and senior management levels. Foreigners should only be hired where specialist skills are missing in Singaporeans. Government-linked companies should start the trend by enrolling more Singaporeans in the executive and management positions.

We should review policies that put Singaporeans at a disadvantage compared to foreign staff. One particular policy is the national service obligation of Singapore men. After 50 years, it is time to review the two-year national service period in light of technological progress and new organisational methods and training. Can the national service obligation and annual reservist training be shortened meaningfully so that our Singaporean men are not disadvantaged in the workplace?

### Strong Families

The ultimate solution to the persistent problem of manpower shortage is to raise the fertility rate from about 1.2 to well above 2. We must reduce substantially the costs to families of having more children by granting more and bigger child allowances and providing free education from pre-school to university. Childcare facilities should be heavily subsidised.

Caring for children should not be at the expense of a mother's career. Work should not take too much time away from the family. This can be achieved if jobs and services are available near home. Hence offices, workshops, schools, pre-schools, childcare centres, clinics, hospitals, health clubs, cinemas, shops should be located in the community so that they can be reached within 15 minutes. These facilities should be decentralised throughout Singapore so that criss-cross travelling can be minimised and women do not need to travel far from home. Flexible working arrangements can be better organised to accommodate the needs of housewives and active seniors.

We will provide the substantial funds needed to redevelop existing housing estates and transform them into vibrant self-contained communities where families live, work and play with jobs, services and entertainment provided near their homes. We will adopt a new method to assess the efficiency and effectiveness of public service agencies such as schools, childcare centres, clinics, hospitals and nursing homes. They will be judged not solely by internal cost calculations but more importantly, by how well they provide for the care and convenience of residents in the community.



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These new measures will enable more housewives and active seniors to join the workforce and provide immediate relief to the problem of manpower shortage. In the longer term, the vastly improved fertility rate will result in a more socially stable source of manpower for the economy instead of relying on an unending supply of foreign workers as envisaged in the misguided Population White Paper. We can develop a robust and internationally competitive economy without a high dependence on foreign labour as many countries have shown, for example Denmark and Finland, both of which have a similar population size of around 5 million as Singapore.

### Esteemed People

A *kiasu* mentality is bad for both the heart and the soul. It holds us back from venturing forth with spontaneity and audacity. What makes Singaporeans so *kiasu*, so lacking in self-esteem, so stressed up that we "earn" the triple dubious reputations of being the most stressed, the unhappiest and the least emotional people in the world? It is the fear of failure because failure in Singapore exacts a heavy economic and social price. There is no social safety net of any significance to provide assistance. Once a person loses a job, he loses everything - no unemployment insurance, no healthcare, no savings for retirement. All this adds to the emotional insecurity and a lowered sense of self-esteem.

A strong safety net will prevent Singaporeans from falling into insecurity, despair and indignity. This safety net must have three basic elements namely

1. truly affordable universal and comprehensive healthcare insurance,
2. unemployment insurance and
3. an old age pension provided by the state outside of the inadequate CPF.

With massive financial surpluses accumulated in the last four to five decades, Singapore can provide this strong safety net and turn Singaporeans away from *kiasu-ness* to become a confident people with high self-esteem. It will ignite the creative spark in Singaporeans and transform us into an innovative people brimming with new ideas to change and improve the world around us.

We have the means and the responsibility to reinvent Singaporeans into a new class of people with grace, self-assurance and dignity. We are ***Singaporeans First***.