

PRESIDENT S R NATHAN'S TRIBUTE TO MR HO SEE BENG

I am deeply saddened by the news of the passing away of Mr Ho See Beng – a long-time stalwart of the Labour Movement; co-founder of NTUC; and Parliamentarian for many years. He was in the forefront of the group led by the late Devan Nair that established today's NTUC. He was in the thick of the fight for control of the Labour Movement and emergence of the non-Communist Trade Union Centre. He was approachable. His special grace was that he knew how to listen and make others listen to his appeals. In the founding years of NTUC, he treated me and my colleagues in the Labour Research Unit as his partners as the strength of the NTUC movement was built up under his and Devan's leadership. He invested all his time and energy in forging the disparate group of Trade Unions that moved away from the pro-Communist camp to his fold.

Ho See Beng worked hard to keep the Unions that were rallying around the newly formed NTUC, from straying back to their previous pro-Communist affiliations. Through his personal attention, he, together with the late Seah Mui Kok and others under the leadership of the late Devan Nair, were the prime movers behind NTUC's struggle. Despite the mounting agitation and pressure that marked the early years of the NTUC, Ho See Beng was one who was never deterred. He gave confidence to many Unionists who were hesitant to remain in its fold and fought the pro-Communist remnants with equal vigour and determination.

As an MP representing Labour interest, Ho See Beng was outspoken in meetings with both management and Government. He had always forcefully presented the Workers' point of view in matters debated in Parliament. Following Independence and the dire situation of increasing unemployment, he stood for change and understood what needed to be done for more jobs to be created and for which foreign investments were vital. He was in the forefront of the transformation that NTUC underwent, the emergence of NTUC Co-operatives, and the practice of tripartitism.

Whether with union leaders or workers, Ho See Beng was unpretentious. He used his influence to conciliate among contending trade union leaders and helped the Pioneer Industries Union garner support in the founding factories of emerging Jurong. He also played a signal role in getting NTUC affiliates in those early years to understand and temper their militancy for the larger interest of creating a climate to secure investments and with that, more jobs and a larger economic cake to be shared by workers.

Ho See Beng had no pretensions, and was unflappable in arguments. He never allowed his personal opinion to prevail against better ones of others, so long as they served the interests of workers and the NTUC. To me, he was always someone I could turn to. The bonds I established with Ho See Beng in the

Labour Movement had stood the test of time. Even as I left the Labour Movement and advanced in my years in the civil service and diplomatic career, he remained the friend he always was. I offer my deepest condolences to his family.

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