

TEXT OF SPEECH BY THE MINISTER FOR HOME AFFAIRS, DR. WONG LIH KEN, AT THE ANNUAL DINNER OF THE SINGAPORE POLYTECHNIC STUDENTS' UNION AT THE HAPPY RESTAURANT, LION CITY HOTEL, ON SATURDAY, JUNE 26, AT 8 P.M.

It is my privilege to address you at this annual dinner of the Singapore Polytechnic Students' Union.

In this technological age in Singapore, the students of the Singapore Polytechnic are a fortunate group of people. Whereas graduates of the universities may have to wait for as long as six months to a year to get a job, Singapore Polytechnic graduates usually get employment within a month or two after graduation. With the change in Government policy in the industrialisation programme of Singapore, there were incumbent changes in the programme of studies and training in the Singapore Polytechnic in 1959. But even with the implementation of these institutional changes since then, we still have not been able to bridge the gap between demand and supply at the technician level. It is owing to the continuing and ever increasing existence of this gap that the Polytechnic graduate finds himself today in the enviable position of commanding a better career market than the graduate from the universities.

When the Singapore Polytechnic was first re-organised in 1959 the enrolment figure for all the courses stood at 1,993. Now the set-up has been further re-organised so that where the institution once also trained personnel for the craft and advanced craft as well as for the technician and professional diploma levels, now it focuses on only the technical level personnel - the important middle man who comes between the craftsman and the professional engineer. The present enrolment stands at a little over 4,500. Owing to limited accommodation at the present campus in Prince Edward Road, it is not possible to take in more students at the moment. However, the Singapore Polytechnic shall be able to expand our numbers as soon as the new site in Dover Road is ready. It is expected that this will be in the very near future. If all goes according to plan, by 1975, the projected expansion will encompass some 6,500 students on the new campus.

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I hope that all of you or as many of you as possible will graduate at the end of your course. Our graduating numbers have increased from 384 in 1970 to about 700 in 1971. In a few years' time we hope to have as many as 1,300 graduates in a year and thus help further to bridge the widening gap between the demand for and the supply of skilled technicians for the Republic. Our Republic's only natural resource is the human being. Unless we make full use of our sole natural resource, we cannot survive as a nation. You are our only natural resource. Upon you, as skilled technicians, rests a large part of the responsibility for the success or failure of our industrialization programme. Wear this crown of responsibility with all the grace you can muster, go out to meet this world well-earned with the initial training you receive from the Polytechnic.

As long as we live we learn. Education does not end when we leave a secondary or a tertiary institution. In fact, for many, the real life education begins only after graduation and when working life begins. Formal education must necessarily end. In the final analysis, especially for technician personnel, it is the day to day on the job experience that constitutes the essence of learning.

In the Polytechnic competition is controlled. Once you start to earn a living then the qualities not shown in your examination will contribute to your being a success or a failure in life. Before I conclude, permit me to congratulate those who have excelled themselves in extra-curricular activities. Their awards are well-deserved.

JUNE 26, 1971.

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