



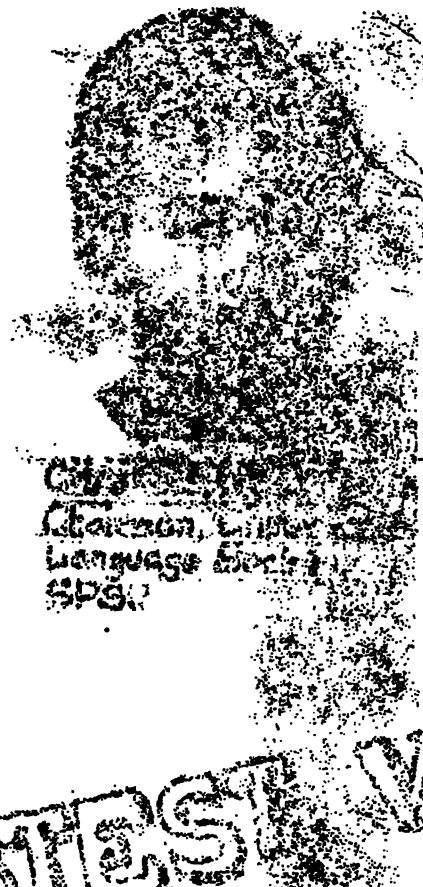
THE STUDENTS' VOICE

SPECIAL ISSUE
SEPT 1976

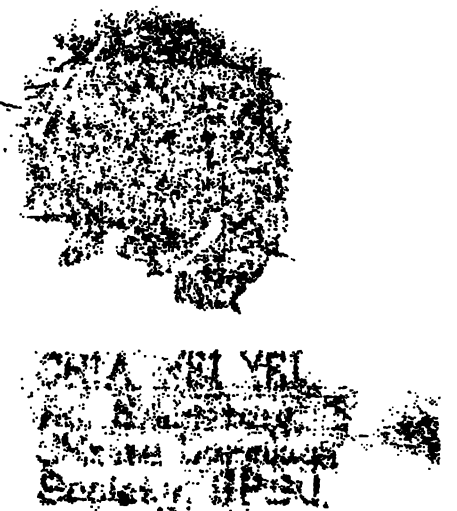
AN INTERNAL PUBLICATION OF THE SINGAPORE POLYTECHNIC STUDENTS' UNION



LIM KAH YEH
President SPSU



CHAY WEI YEH
Chairman, Language Society
SPSU

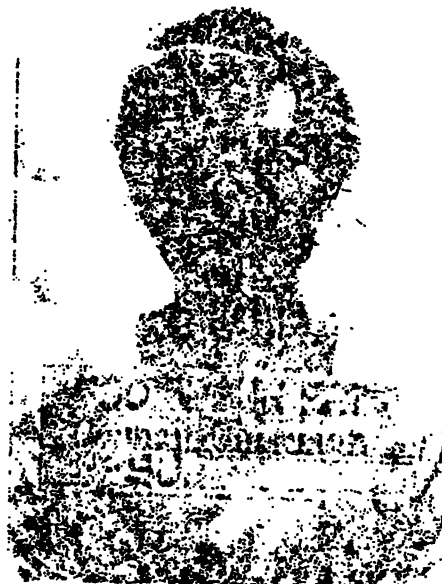


CHAY WEI YEH
Chairman, State Language Society
SPSU

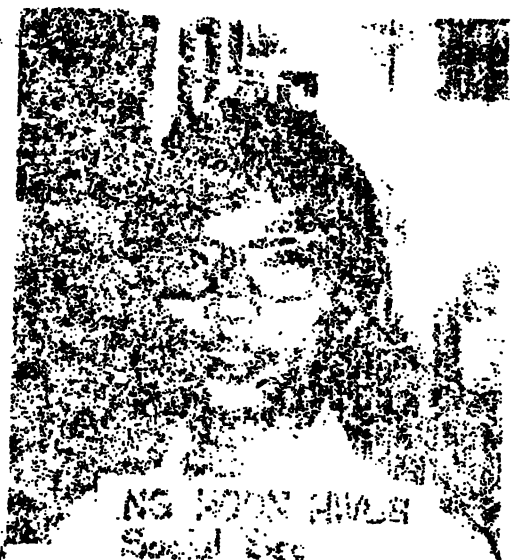
LEE'S LATEST VICTIMS



LIM TAW HUI
Union House Sec
SPSU



LIM TAW HUI
Union House Sec
SPSU



NG HOON HUI
Social Sec
SPSU

"How much blood has flowed,
countless broken bones
scattered on this mute floor
in island Singapore."

All over this world are
Broken bones and bloody tears
For all over this world are
Thousands of prisons and
Millions of Heroes.

In the name of 'security', they
Fill frightful dungeons to protect
the security of a few;
In the name of the 'Law',
The People are robbed and drugged
With shouts of 'democracy'.

---- USMAN AWANG.

ARRESTS

On 29th July 1976, the Singapore Polytechnic Students' Union (SPSU) Union House was raided by more than 15 plainclothes Internal Security Department agents. The Union House was cordoned off and the entire place ransacked. Cabinets and drawers were forced open by the agents who seized files and photographs. When the dozen or so students there protested, the agents said they were looking for drugs! Foo Chin Yen, President of SPSU, Foo Weng Fatt, Chairman of the Council and Chai Chong, a recent graduate were manhandled, handcuffed and led away. The entire operation was carried out without the agents procuring search warrants or warrants for arrests. When they were demanded for they the students, the agents said, "You have no respect for the law huh?!" Neither were the students allowed to telephone their lawyer.

At the same time, Lim Tiow Hui, SPSU Assistant Financial Secretary, Ng Hoon Hwee, SPSU Social Secretary and Chia Yei Yei, a Polytechnic student were arrested from their homes, which too were raided. Four days later, Chia Yei Cher, sister of Yei Yei, a former student of the Singapore Technical Institute as also arrested. Yei Cher was released a week later on 6th August '76. Her release shows nothing but the total arbitrariness of the government's legalised kidnapping operations on Singapore citizens.

The day after the arrests, the Minister of Home Affairs announced that the students and 5 other persons (these were construction and factory workers, National Servicemen, to make the Ministry statement sound more authentic) were arrested for their involvement in a 'satellite organisation of the Malayan Communist Party'. The statement was simply made without any substantiation whatsoever.

THE ARRESTED STUDENTS

Foo Chin Yen (Permanent Resident of Singapore, President of the 15th Students' Council, 21 years old.)

Foo, more fondly known as 'Captain' to those actively working with him, was just as apathetic as a lot of other Polytechnic students in his first year. During his second year, in the Polytechnic, SPSU together with USSU organised the anti-busfare hike campaign, Bangladesh Flood Relief Campaign and took up the Tasek Utara issue. These and Wah Piow's Trial gave him a lot of impact and he started to think seriously about his role in the campus as well as in the society.

The following holiday, he plunged into the organisation of the orientation activities for the new students of the Polytechnic. After the orientation period, he decided to stand for the Students' Council Elections. He was voted in as a Councillor.

No one in the group of all those voted into the Council was prepared to take up the post of President as they were all very green and inexperienced. Many however felt that Foo was then the most suitable of them all and urged him to take up this post.

The first problem that they had to face when they came into office was the Polytechnic Administration's refusal to collect Union fees for the Union. Student apathy was common in the campus. All these did not dishearten him and he started to organise activities for the students together with the others. The response of the students for the first activities was not overwhelming but what was encouraging was that more and more students came to help in the Union work. It made him more certain that he was doing the right thing. In fact he had no regrets to repeat when he failed his third year as he felt that he could still contribute to the Union for another year.

A friend once asked Foo whether the many, many tasks he was taking on, a burden, "like selling Technocrat". Looking genuinely surprised and somewhat taken aback, Foo replied, "How could it be a burden? Every copy sold meant one more person shall get to know the truth." For him, the question of work being a burden did not arise at all.

Foo often questions why the authorities prefer to spend their time trying to classify activities into political or non-political instead of asking whether the activities are correct or not.

Just for his sincerity to play his part in the campus and just because he dared to criticise when he felt that certain government policies are not planned in the interest of the majority of the people, the authorities arrested and branded him as a 'communist'. It is an outright lie.

Foo Weng Fatt (Malaysian and Chairman of the 16th Students' Council, 21 yrs old)

Weng Fatt strikes a lot of his friends as a very friendly and jovial person. He was a very conscientious student in his first year and scored good grades for his first examination. However, through issues like the Bangla-Desh Flood Relief campaign and Wah Piow's Trial he started to question the value of the paper chase.

When asked to take up the post of the Chairman of the Council, he foresaw a lot of difficulties in chairing meetings and performing his role as a chairman as he had no previous experience whatsoever. But he was determined to try to learn to play his role well. And he did.* (see footnote)

Lim Tiow Hui (Malaysian, Assistant Financial Secretary, 21 yrs old)

Tiow Hui comes from a poor family. He had his secondary education in Muar and Penang. After the Malaysian Certificate Examinations, he worked in Kuala Lumpur as a machine operator and supervisor.

For half a year in the Polytechnic, he had a dose of the 3L life (lecture-lunch-library). He was not happy. When SPSU took up the Bangla-Desh and Tasek Utara issues, Tiow Hui participated actively in all these activities. Through his involvement, he began to realise that he had a role to play in society. He stood for the 75/76 Council Elections and was elected to be the Union House Secretary.

Tiow Hui is well-known to his friends as a courageous, firm and righteous person. His firm stand against wrong doing e.g. regarding gambling in the Union House led to many confrontation with certain students. But he will stand firm by his principles and not budge an inch.

He is very responsible in his work. Sometimes he went to the extent of skipping classes to take of the welfare of the students. He is also a very analytical person and always stressed that "we must always question for it is through questioning that we learn and progress". To accuse him of being involved in communist activities is pure fabrication.

* Weng Fatt was subsequently released unconditionally in August. He was not informed until just before he was freed and not allowed to return to his cell to tell the other arrested students the circumstances of his release. Other than illustrating the arbitrariness of arrests in S'pore, the result of this is: those detained are left to speculate as to what Weng Fatt had or had not signed and this can be used to psychologically force the others to sign "confessions".

Ng Hoon Hwee (Singaporean, Social Secretary of the 16th Students' Council, 20 years old)

His friends know him as a jovial person and he is liked by everyone for his funny jokes.

His involvement in Union started when he was in second year. During the 75/76 Orientation period, he helped to organise activities for the incoming new students. After the Orientation period, he was persuaded to run for Council elections. He consented as he felt that he could contribute there. He subsequently became the Social Secretary. His involvement in the Union is clearly motivated by his desire to contribute his part in the Union. There is therefore no grounds to believe that he is involved in any communist underground activities.

Chia Yei Yei (Singaporean, Assistant Hon Gen Sec of the Chinese Language Society, an affiliate of SPSU, 19 years old.)

A head-strong girl, her mother said that she will only go ahead to do things only if she is very clear that she is doing the correct thing.

Yei Yei is the eldest in a family of 8. Her father is a lorry driver and her mother a quarry worker. They cannot see why the authorities must imprison their daughter for taking a more active role in the society to organise activities for her fellow students.

Chai Chong (Singaporean, Chairman of the Chinese Language Society, 21 years)

Chai Chong strikes his friends as a very honest and stright-forward person. His father, a farmer, said that since very young he exhibited very honest tendencies. They stay in an atap house in Chua Chū Kang and at that time their neighbour often stored their wood at Chai Chong's place. Sometimes Chai Chong's father would take a few pieces of their neighbour's wood for emergency use when their own storage of firewood ran out. If seen by Chai Chong, he would invariably be stopped and reprimanded for taking things not belonging to them.

he was very actively involved in organising student welfare activities whilst he was in the Polytechnic and in searching for a broader outlook of life, and he worked closely with fellow students in organising activities which gave them a chance to get to understand more about the Singapore society and her people.

Reaffirmed that students should contribute their part to society, he participated in almost all of the social issues taken up by SPSU in the last few years.

At the demonstrations organised by the Vocational Institute students in protest of the withdrawal of their bus concession passes by the Singapore Bus Service this year, Chai Chong was confronted by policemen while he was busy taking photographs for the society's publications. He was detained, interrogated in an air-conditioned room for more than 10 hours non-stop and subsequently released 1 day later.

Chai Chong has boundless energy in his enthusiasm for his work in the Society. Neither is his contribution to SPSU negligible. In fact, to many of those who have worked with him directly or indirectly, his dedication to work is a source of inspiration.

ARREST OF TWO OTHER POLYTECHNIC GRADUATES - "THE NATIONAL SERVICEMEN"

On the same day, 27th July 1976, that the Singapore Polytechnic Students' Union officials were arrested, the Singapore government issued a statement claiming that five other persons had also been taken in for the same grounds - involvement in a 'satellite organisation of the Malayan Communist Party". The five were dubiously described as construction workers, National Servicemen etc, giving a sinister impression that a red plot to undermine all sectors of the population was rife. It was only after an intensive search by anxious

parents that it was found that the two National Servicemen were recent Polytechnic graduates and who had been active participants in activities organised jointly by the University of Singapore Students' Union and the Singapore Polytechnic Students' Union.

Tan Puay Chew (Singaporean)

A Mechanical Engineering graduate of the Singapore Polytechnic, he was liable to be called up for National Service. On 27th July he was called up by the Central Manpower Base, but it was only a pretext for the arrest. Two days later they escorted him home and searched his house at 7am. Since then the family has not heard anything about him. His parents went to the Criminal Investigation Department to check, but the authorities denied that they had detained him. His arrest was confirmed by those other parents whose children were locked up together with him in the same cell.

Puay Chew is a jovial and friendly character. He comes from the middle-income class. He spent his first two years in the Polytechnic slaving under the 3L life. In his last year the issues organised by the Students' Union made a great impact on him, especially the trial of Tan Wah Piow. The issues provoked him to question the social role of students and since then, he has actively participated in all the activities organised by the Students' Union.

Although his family exerted a lot of pressure to discourage his involvement for fear of being blacklisted, he was determined to carry on doing what he understood was correct.

Ang Boon Hwee (Singaporean)

An Engineering (Electrical) graduate of the Singapore Polytechnic, he is presently a National Serviceman. While in the Polytechnic, he proved himself a brilliant student. He scored four distinctions in his first and second year and all A's in the third year.

Before coming to the Polytechnic, he was that type of student who buried himself in textbooks day and night and watched sword-fighting films for leisure. His third year in the polytechnic was a turning point in his life. That year, 1974, a series of events took place in Singapore. He was a keen participant in the issue organised by the University of Singapore Students' Union and the Singapore Polytechnic Students' Union. His participation made him realise his role as a student in society. The same year, he joined the Freshmen Orientation Committee of the Students' Union as an assistant group leader. He also helped in the exhibition and workcamp of the Orientation committee.

Hoon Hwee comes from a poor family. His parents are proud of their son's good academic performance. He is outspoken, jovial and has strong feelings against acts of injustice, and an honest person who never fails to keep his word.

STUDENT RESPONSE TO THE ARRESTS

Solidarity Rally

On the very day of the arrests, a solidarity rally was held on campus. Over 300 students attended and despite the shock and the fear, a number of new student leaders stood and spoke up, urging students to unite in the face of irrational repression.

Mass-sit-in

A mass sit-in was announced for the next day but the campus was rife with rumours of more arrests. The Polytechnic Administration put on the clamp by ordering that special class attendance be taken, and at the same time issued a statement that the students had been arrested for communist and not students' Union activities. With pressure from the Administration and from frightened parents, many students stayed away, yet a surprisingly large number (500) turned up for the sit-in.

5-point demand:

The students' Union handed in a 5-point demand to the Administration.

The students demanded

1. That the arrested students be freed unconditionally since they have not been proved guilty.
2. that all those detained be given an open and fair trial before an independent judiciary body, comprising neutral citizens from all walks of life.
3. that the charges made against them be released and substantiated by facts and evidence to justify such
4. that those arrested be allowed to make uncensored presentation of their defense. This is essential for every Singaporean to know the complete picture and make a fair judgement
5. that security of all students be guaranteed and not subjected to arbitrary victimization and persecution.

The Administration refused to meet the student representation. *see footnote

Publication : Newspapers had deliberately played down the student arrest and the subsequent statements and demands made by the Students' Union. The brief statement from the government gave the whole affair a sinister air of subversion. In order to inform the people of what was happening and who the arrested students were, the students overnight cyclostyled tens of thousands of copies of their publication, the Singapore Technocrat and distributed them to the public.

Elections : The arrests had "coincidentally" fallen on the SPSU Council Nominations Day which therefore had to be postponed. Despite the resulting fear, many students finally came forward to run for the elections and to carry on the socially-oriented trend of work. The authorities' attempt to disrupt the elections was a total failure.

RESPONSE FROM PARENTS

After the arrests, Union officials contacted the parents of the detained students and arranged for them to meet each other. All except Wong Fatt's parents, who were in Malaysia, came. All are certain that their children are not involved in any underground communist activities and questioned the government's reasons for taking them into prison.

A Press Conference was arranged for the parents but nothing of it came out in any of the newspapers. A Press statement issued by the parents contained a demand for evidence from the authorities, an open trial for the detainees and unconditional release of their children. (See Appendix A)

The arrest of the students made their parents see more clearly the irrationality of the authorities. It made them question why the authorities had to take such actions to the extent of keeping their children under ISA. Their children are only trying to organise healthy activities for the students in the campus.

Footnote : The Polytechnic Administration later brought out a set of Guidelines as conditions for collecting fees on behalf of the Union. Amongst other things, the Guidelines required that the Students' Union accept the Polytechnic Principal as its advisor and that all expenditure must be approved by the Polytechnic Administration, before hand.
(See Appendix B)

PRISON CONDITIONS -- PRESSURE TO SIGN

The arrested students are at present detained in the Whitley Holding Centre for political detainees. It is a well-known fact that special physical assault tactics are employed in this detention camp to cause injury to internal organs but which are not detectable under medical scrutiny. Most of those brought here are beaten up.

For more than a week after the arrests, the parents were not allowed to see their children. After much insistence from all the parents, permission was granted for Hoon Hwee's parents to see him on 6th August, 8 days after the arrest.

The parents of Tiow Hui, Yei Yei, Foo Chin Yen and Chai Chong were verbally given permission by the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) to see their children on 7th August. However, when they reached the Detention Camp, Chai Chong's and Foo's parents were not allowed to see them. The others were allowed to see their children. The prison officials told them that the permission was withdrawn because they had come in the SPSU van accompanied by SPSU officials, and they did not want SPSU to publicise anything on this visit.

Parents who saw the detained students said that the detained were subjected to long hours of interrogation, sometimes as long as 7 hours a day. They all looked very tired and haggard. Also the detained students were asked to sign a statement they were arrested not because of their Union activities. None complied.

ACTIVITIES OF SPSU AND MOTIVE FOR THE ARRESTS

The awakening of the Polytechnic students cannot be separated from the rise of the University of Singapore students. Spurred on by the University students the Polytechnic students joined in a protest against busfare increase in 1974 and since then, they have never stopped moving forward ...

The student unions of the University of Singapore and the Singapore Polytechnic jointly campaigned for the flood victims of Bangladesh, the squatters of Tasek Utara, Johor and conducted a survey on the problem of retrenchment in Singapore. The Polytechnic students also helped in publicising the 47 day-long trial of Tan Wah Piow which gave many an insight into the farcical nature of our judiciary system.

In Nov '75 when Parliament "reconstituted" the University of Singapore Students Union (USSU), SPSU remained the only vocal organisation that could express honest and critical views on government policies that act against the interests of the majority. The Technocrat, official publication of SPSU discussed the bases of issues such as Asean, the anti-drug campaign, Lee's visit to China, on Singaporeans. In the last few months, camps, cultural shows, surveys, sports and other social and educational activities were organised by SPSU to consolidate the student body. Many students, have found these eye-opening^{and} several new faces can be seen helping in the organisation of Union activities.

However, with the increasing support and awareness of the student body, the authorities stepped up repressive measures on the growing movement. Although the most blatant and violent so far, the arrests are not the first of these moves by the authorities. For the last 2 years, hoping to cripple the Union financially, the Polytechnic administration stopped collecting union fees together with tuition fees, breaking a long-standing practice.

Rumours were spread and students instigated over internal issues to the extent that the SPSU Vice-President was physically assaulted. Recently, some active students have been called up by the Central Manpower Base on the pretext of National Service call-up and subjected to long interviews. Yet SPSU fought on and in the then coming student elections, it looked as if the active and socially-orientated trend in the leadership would continue, and grow, despite all the obstacles.

The raid was well-timed on the dawn of the SPSU nomination day (for the coming Students' Council elections). Three of the arrested student leaders, Foo Chin Yen, Foo Weng Fatt and Lim Tiow Hui are eligible to stand for the coming elections. Apart from crippling the Union leadership, the label of 'communists' is clearly aimed at creating fear among the student body and discouraging participation in the coming elections.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE ARRESTS IN THE POLITICAL CONTEXT OF SINGAPORE

1976 is Election Year. Thus, nobody in Singapore is really surprised at the recent spate of arrests. Such exercises occur in Singapore before every General Election. However, this time, there had been mounting international criticisms of the PAP's repressive and high-handed policies. This resulted in a move to expel the PAP from the Socialist International (S.I.) In order to justify itself to the S.I., the PAP had, since February made a flurry of arrests -- some were well-publicised and followed by highly-dramatised "confessions" to prove to the PAP's international critics that the "Red threat" still exists in Singapore. Most of the other arrests were carried out without publicity and aimed mainly at suppressing all forms of opposition before the Elections.

The SPSU arrests was meant to serve both purposes. On the one hand, it could cripple the Union leadership and thus stifle any effective opposition. On the other hand, it served to justify the PAP's actions in "reconstituting" the University of Singapore Students Union by "proving" that communist manipulation of students unions exists and thus vindicating itself before the S.I.

The SPSU arrests is an attempt to nip in the bud, the new growing student movement in Singapore. With all effective political opponents languishing in jail and the trade unions under the thumb of PAP cadres such as Devan Nair and Phey Yew Kok (both of whom are also Members of Parliament), the only independent-minded movement left was on the campuses. Things had been generally stifled since the quelling of the Chinese-stream students organisations in the 50's, and 60's. The Nanyang University Students Union was banned in 1963 after it had organised a public referendum on the issue of Singapore-joining in the Merger to form Malaysia. Since 1969, all students entering tertiary institutions have to obtain a Suitability Certificate to ascertain that they have no affiliation with political groupings that oppose the PAP government.

However, 1974 saw a rising tide of student politicization and social involvement within Lee Kuan Yew's own elite English-Educated group. Students in both the two English-speaking campuses, initially led by those from the University of Singapore Students Union (USSU), began to voice criticism and bring attention to the problems faced by the majority poor. The violent reactions of the PAP government served to educate many students as to the political nature of their government.

The arrested SPSU students are part of the second generation of students, who, far from being cowed by the arrests, deportation and imprisonment of USSU leaders, returned to their own campus to organize even harder to arouse more students.

After the banning of USSU in 1975, SPSU was obviously the only organisation remaining that could organise any form of questioning and criticism and that could openly publish articles critical of the PAP government. The arrests were clearly hoped to be a death blow onto the PAP's only open opposition in Singapore -- the Student Movement.

Such acts must be brought to the attention of more people. For the safety of these inhumanely and unjustly detained students, we urge you to do what you can, by explaining the issue to your family, friends and neighbours. It is clear that this round of arrests would not be the last in Singapore.

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PARTING NOTE ON CONFESSIONS

When reading, listening to, or watching "Confessions", did you think of the following :

WHY ARE THERE SO MANY CONFESSIONS THIS YEAR.?

- Why were these people "confessing"?

DO YOU BELIEVE THE 'CONFESSORS' WERE REPENTANT? DID THEY LOOK AND SOUND SORRY, OR DID THEY LOOK HUMILIATED, OR WHAT ?

- How do you think they, as Human Beings, were feeling?

If they did not really think they had acted on wrong principles, then they may be doing it to get out of prison.

If they are willing to go to the extent of renouncing their principles, then can you really believe what they say was true ?

IF YOU THINK THEY ARE NOT SUCH PEOPLE, THEN CAN YOU IMAGINE WHAT TORTURE AND TORMENT MUST HAVE FORCED THEM TO SUBMIT TO SUCH DEGRADATION ?

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APPENDIX A

AN OPEN LETTER FROM THE PARENTS OF THE ARRESTED STUDENTS

Mr. Chua Sian Chin,
Minister of Home Affairs,
Republic of Singapore.

Dear Sir,

We are the parents of Foo Chin Yen, Lim Tiow Hui, Foo Weng Fatt, Chia Yei Yei, Ng Hoon Hwee and Chai Chong, the six students and recent graduates of the Singapore Polytechnic. Our children were arrested by the Internal Security agents in the early morning of 29th July 1976. These arrests were made separately in the Polytechnic Students' Union House and in our homes.

Our children are active members of the Students' Union and her constituent bodies which are registered Students' Organisations. They merely participated in these organisations, As such, we question: "What wrongs have they done? What offence have they committed?" We believe that our children have done nothing wrong. We DEMAND all allegations put on them be backed by facts and evidence. We do not want false accusations and make-believe stories forcibly thrown upon our sons and daughters.

We also strongly DEMAND that the Minister of Home Affairs release our children unconditionally. If they have committed any offence, put them on an open trial. This is subscribing to the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights which states in Article 2, that:

"Everyone is entitled to all the Rights and Freedom set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as Race, Colour, Origin, Sex, Language, Religion, Political, or their Opinion, National or Social Origin, Property, Birth or other status. Furthermore, no distinction shall be made on the basis of the Political jurisdictional of Internal status of the Country of territory to which a person belongs, whether it be independent, trust, self-governing or under any other limitation of sovereignty."

In Article 9, that:

"No one shall be subject to arbitrary arrest, or exile."

We hopefully await the earliest return of our children's freedom.

Yours in the name of Human Rights,
Signed,

Parents of Foo Chin Yen, Lim Tiow Hui, Ng Hoon Hwee, Chai Chong, Chia Yei Yei.