

ENGAGING OUR YOUTHS

Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong has called on youths to step forward and make a difference. Youth leader Mervyn Sek is of the opinion that it is a shared responsibility between our youths and the State

The universities have always been the breeding ground for politically inclined youths. Some have moved on to be MPs and Ministers, while others have chosen to challenge the system as opposition politicians. Undergraduate politics is now dormant, as much of their sting has been removed when some students were found to be too politically active. After student union president Tan Wah Piow agitated students in 1974 to protest against the government, more careful attention over students' political explorations quickly followed. The government also hit them hard by minimising their financial support. As such, the student unionists have become a

pathetic lot who are more concerned about raising funds for their own student activities than about speaking up about current issues on the national agenda. Has there been any youth-driven initiative to gather and present the youths' perspectives on the casino issue?

To successfully create a society of engaged youths, both our youth and the State need to shoulder their respective responsibilities. Our youth need to proactively take individual responsibility and decisions to embrace their duty as active citizens. The State needs to create appropriate structures for representation to facilitate their engagement as active citizens.

In schools, political education is often limited to studies on civic, moral, social and national issues, but neglects democratic values, such as political participation and the rights to freely express one's political views. Youths should therefore be provided with non-examinable, enrichment lessons in citizenship focusing on human rights, the rule of law, the right to vote, critical thinking and logical reasoning, social research skills, debating and public speaking skills, and the understanding of policy formulation and governance in Singapore. Such lessons would cultivate democratic values amongst youths, and raise their awareness of political issues and current affairs through informed discussion and debate. This shall help develop a sense of

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nationalism amongst youths, and encourage active youth participation in national development and governmental affairs.

To provide youths with the conducive socio-political environment for them to serve and participate, a youth representative should be elected, or otherwise appointed, as a member of the governing board or council of every community organisation and educational institution. This would promote and cultivate a sense of organisational governance amongst youths, which shall help encourage active youth engagement in politics.

Hopefully, as more youths take part in future forums, national causes and community leadership, and join in the endeavour to be more politically aware and educated, it will contribute to the country's overall development and political renewal. A good dose of youth engagement can only lead to a more well-rounded education for the individual. When it comes to the future, there are three kinds of people: those who let it happen, those who make it happen, and those who wonder what happened. Let the youths make the future for themselves. Educate them. Enable them. Empower them. Then you will successfully engage them. **TG**

About the writer: Mervyn Sek is a teaching scholar currently serving his National Service after completing his Honours and Master Degree at NUS. Having served in over 40 designations during his university days, Sek still remains an active youth and community leader. He looks forward to more young NUSS members coming forward to serve in the NUSS Young Chapter Sub-Committee. Please forward all comments to mervyn_sek@hotmail.com

