



Emergency committee for human rights
in Singapore

UPDATE NO. 11
SINGAPORE HUMAN RIGHTS ALERT

12 AUGUST 1987

LEGAL STEPS BY DETAINEES. SOLITARY CONFINEMENT CONTINUES.
LAWYERS BLACKLISTED. NEGATIVE FEEDBACK IN SINGAPORE. LOW MORALE
AMONG PROFESSIONALS. MORE POLITICIANS SPEAK OUT. NEW GOVT
STRATEGY TO IMPLICATE SECOND ECHELON LEADERS. TIGHT SECURITY FOR
NATIONAL DAY. PM "SURPRISED". SYMPATHETIC AMBASSADOR TOWS GOVT
LINE. STRONG PROTEST ACTIONS IN US CONGRESS AND WORLDWIDE.
AIRLINE BOYCOTT TAKES OFF. ARCHBISHOP OF PERTH LEADS MASS. NZ
PRIME MINISTER LANGE EXPRESSES CONCERN.

LEGAL REPRESENTATIONS FILED

Four detainees (Ms TEO Soh Lung, Ms TANG Fong Har, Ms CHNG Suan Tze, Mr CHEW Kheng Chuan) have now filed legal representations contesting the grounds for their detention orders. The representations are heard by an advisory board which makes recommendations to the President of Singapore. It is confirmed that the judge on the board is Mr Justice T S Sinnathuray, the judge who convicted Mr Tan Wah Piow on political charges in 1974.

The hearing of the representations of the two lawyers (Ms Teo and Ms Tang) will be held in camera on 15 August at 9.30 a.m. in High Court No.6. Mr Francis Seow will be leading counsel for Ms Teo..

DETAINED IN SOLITARY

Since their arrest without trial on May 21, Ms Teo Soh Lung (lawyer and member of the Law Society Council) and Ms Lim Li-Kok (publisher and bookshop owner) have been held in solitary confinement. Ms Tang Fong Har (lawyer) is also reported to be still imprisoned in solitary confinement since her arrest on June 20. Most of the other 12 detainees are reported to be sharing cells.

Further confirmation has been received that Mr CHEW Kheng Chuan and others were beaten badly during the initial period of interrogation and also kept in a small windowless cell. Mr Chew was at times reportedly interrogated by the director of the Internal Security Dept. He has not been permitted to retract statements forced out of him while under torture. For some detainees interrogations are now down to once a week or less, but others are reported to be interrogated twice a week or more.

FAMILY TENSION

As predicted, the security police have also been using various methods to break the sense of trust and solidarity between

detainees' families. The emerging discrepancies in treatment of the detainees have also increased these tensions. Manipulating such tensions is a well-worn secret police tactic.

BLACKLISTED LAWYERS

Officers of the Internal Security Department have told detainees' families that the government has blacklisted three lawyers and that these lawyers should not be used. These lawyers are: Ms Roslina Bte Baba (Legal Assistant in Ms Teo Soh Lung's firm of Teo, Lai & Lee), Mr Patrick Seong (member of the Law Society Council and Catholic layperson), Mr Francis Seow (former President of the Law Society). It is assumed that such pressure has been applied because these lawyers are very able and have been least susceptible to government intimidation.

PROFESSIONALS & BUSINESS-PEOPLE INTERROGATED

Towards the end of July several business people and young professional acquaintances and spouses were interrogated for up to 4 days each by the security police but none have been arrested to date.

SCM UNDER THREAT

Having crushed the Catholic organisations to which the detainees belonged by using the Archbishop of Singapore, there are reports that the govt is now moving to suppress the autonomous Student Christian Movement. SCM is an ecumenical student movement related to the worldwide fellowship called the World Student Christian Federation. Its Protestant roots go back to last century. Throughout its history it has related faith to social concern. Mr Vincent Cheng was once staff person and later chairperson of SCM in Singapore. However, contrary to the Ministry of Home Affairs' statement, Mr William Yap, Ms Ng Bee Leng and Ms Chng Suan Tse were never members of SCM and were never associated with it. To enable it to suppress the movement the Ministry is clearly casting about for a current connection with the present SCM membership who were in primary school in the seventies and know next to nothing about the events and personalities cited by the Ministry.

FEEDBACK REVEALS DISAGREEMENT

In late July, the govt's Feedback Unit, set up to find out community feelings after the drop in govt popularity last elections, held a closed door session between professionals and First Deputy Prime Minister, Goh Chok Tong, the most senior of the second echelon leadership. It is reported that 80% of those who attended disagreed with the govt's actions and were not happy with the detentions. Mr Goh is said to have distanced himself from the detentions.

PACKING THEIR BAGS

While the detentions have had minimal immediate effect on business confidence, it is reported by foreign diplomats in Singapore that there is a crisis of confidence in the middle and senior professional ranks of the civil service. Seeing that

increased prosperity is not going to bring greater democracy even under the next generation of PAP leadership, many professionals are said to be firming up plans to migrate. Many do not want their children to grow up under such repression. This low morale is a serious trend to which the govt will have to respond.

ELDER SCORNS DETENTIONS

Former chairperson of the ruling Peoples' Action Party (PAP) and cabinet minister, Dr TOH Chin Chye, has criticised the govt's handling of the detentions. Now an out-of-favour PAP backbencher, he said the govt has eroded the political values Singapore used to have and he lamented that professionals are now afraid to go into politics. He blamed the govt for this. He further said he used to read Marx and it enriched his political education. He also noted that even the PAP had worked with communists in the past.

GOVT RESPONDS BY SPREADING THE BLAME

Much of the international and local criticism of the detentions focuses on Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew, his succession plans for his son and his need to suppress legitimate dissent before the next elections. He has responded by pushing his hand-picked second echelon leaders to take a share of responsibility for the detentions.

Until now the public running on the affair had been done most prominently by the Prime Minister himself, the Home Affairs Minister and the PM's son, Trade and Industry Minister Brig-General Lee Hsien Loong. Everyone in Singapore knows that the reins of its security organisations are firmly gripped by the prime minister himself. It is doubtful that recent statements by other ministers will change this perception. However, it will prevent these ministers from distancing themselves from the detentions. They have been forced to state in public that the blood of the detainees is on their hands too.

GOVT USES OPPOSITION MEMBER

Acknowledging its credibility gap with the Singapore public the govt decided to go on to the offensive on July 29. It took the opportunity of a motion by the sole opposition member, Mr Chiam See Tong, to hold a full day's parliamentary "debate" on the issue. (Without a seconder from the PAP this would not have been possible.) It was hardly a debate: 15 PAP MPs spoke in favour of the detentions and only Mr Chiam against.

ME TOO, SAYS DEPUTY PM

It was the opportunity for the second echelon leaders to implicate themselves in the actions of their prime minister. THE STRAITS TIMES of July 30 devoted 3 pages to the "debate", the headline declaring "Younger Leaders Decided on Arrests". First Deputy PM, Mr Goh Chok Tong, said it was a tough and unpleasant decision to take but said, "The compelling reason for moving against them now is this. Communist cells are like cancer cells. They multiply very quickly and infect other healthy parts of the

body. If we do not destroy them now, they will destroy us later." Referring to Mr Chiam's statement that the detainees were "innocent young idealists" Mr Goh recalled a meeting with Khmer Rouge leader Ieng Sary who was "gentle, chubby, cherubic", saying "You would never imagine that he was a Khmer Rouge leader capable of senseless genocide".

More importantly, Mr Goh said of the "younger ministers" that "all of us were satisfied that the 16 were indeed involved in some nefarious activities as reported by the ISD".

CHIAM CALLS FOR RELEASE

Opening the "debate" lone opposition member, Mr Chiam See Tong, called for the immediate release of the 15 detainees saying they were no security threat to Singapore and their only "crime" was that they were against the PAP. "There is no valid reason to detain them for even one more day," he said. The govt had extracted "all the political benefits" it could from the arrests, he added. They and their network had been broken and even if they did retain some ideas on Marxism, they could never lead a revolution "after all they had gone through in the hands of the security authorities". He noted that, "Continuous interrogation is a form of torture."

NO EVIDENCE

Referring to the govt's contention that Mr Tan Wah Piow was being manipulated by "unseen hands", Mr Chiam said, "I don't know if people will believe it". He wondered who the phantoms were who were manipulating a law student whose address and telephone number in Britain were easily obtainable. He further noted that the Communist Party of Malaya is "now a shambles" and would be "lucky if it could continue to survive". He said the PAP had over-exaggerated the threats to Singapore and was being melodramatic about them. He said the govt had failed to come up with any evidence that the detainees had advocated bloodshed, chaos and violence.

YOUNG IDEALISTS

Of the detainees, he said, "They are young idealists and intellectuals. They are like you and me. They go for dinners and social functions on Saturday nights and games on Wednesday." Later he noted: "We have reached a certain stage of affluence but as the former president (Devan Nair) said, we have lost our soul and if a man loses his soul, he has lost everything."

TIGHT SECURITY FOR NATIONAL DAY

Singapore's National Day events on August 9 were held under tighter security this year with greater restrictions on spectators and highrise office blocks overlooking the celebrations being subject to greater surveillance. The new nationalistic song "We are Singapore" has been played repeatedly in the mass media (sometimes just before the televised "confessions" of the detainees) and was used to whip up fervour among young people at the celebrations.

PM SURPRISED

In his address the Prime Minister said he was surprised that well-educated professionals who are not deprived of anything would be such a threat but there are always some malcontents who want to change the order of things. He reiterated that the younger ministers decided on the arrests. The PM said he hoped the Catholic church would not mix religion and politics and that no one would use the church as a cover for Marxist purposes. (As UPDATE has yet to receive the written speech, we will report the PM's words directly next time if necessary.)

It is significant that the PM devoted the second part of his address to this topic showing that it must be a major source of disquiet in the community. (The first part of his speech, as usual, was devoted to the economy. A growth rate of 7.2% is predicted for the first 6 months of 1987.)

AMBASSADOR KOH TOWS THE LINE

On August 5, Singapore's Ambassador to the USA, Mr Tommy T B Koh, met in Honolulu with representatives of the American Friends' Service Committee and Prof John Van Dyke, a law professor from the University of Hawaii. The ambassador had visited one of the detainees, Ms Teo Soh Lung, while he was in Singapore because she was a personal acquaintance. He expressed concern over her future career as a lawyer.

However, in discussing the govt's actions, Ambassador Koh reverted to official govt explanations. He stressed that Americans can never understand the situation in Singapore because they have no history of a communist threat. (In the light of American foreign policy this remains a remarkable observation. He continued by outlining the history of the "communist threat" in Singapore.) When questioned about statements by other Asian leaders against the detentions, he replied that they did not understand Singapore either.

MARGIN FOR ERROR

While admitting that the Communist Party of Malaya is dormant, he felt it was still a force. He said that the govt is convinced that Mr Tan Wah Piow who is studying at Oxford is manipulated by the CPM although they have no proof. When asked why the govt does not take up Mr Tan's offer of a public discussion of its allegations, Mr Koh said he did not know Mr Tan or of his offer. When asked what is a Marxist, the ambassador replied that this is very difficult because they don't carry cards. He did recognise however that there is a difference between communists and legitimate social workers and that the Internal Security Act can be abused. He said he was sure there was a margin of error in applying the ISA. He said the govt could not release all its evidence to the public because that would reveal who its own informants were in the church groups.

He further stated that any legitimate social organisation is a

target for CPM infiltration and therefore, regretably, is subject to being closed down by the govt. He referred to the Criminal Law (Temporary Provisions) Act, another draconian act used to imprison secret society members without trial. When asked whether he would place secret society gangsters and political opposition in the same category, he observed that there was no difference in the way Marxists and secret society members should be handled.

The ambassador noted that the govt does not regard the detainees as being in the same category as previous political detainees, more as idealistic young people and he anticipated their release "soon". He said he would have handled the detentions differently in that he would have released more and retained only the "hard core".

PM TAKES BACK SEAT

He maintained the Prime Minister wanted the arrests to be made later after more evidence had been gathered and that the PM regarded the detentions as premature. This raises the possibility that international pressure has caused Mr Lee to shift more responsibility to the second echelon in readiness to refurbish his own image. (UPDATE will receive a fuller report of the ambassador's remarks which will be available upon request.)

50 CONGRESS MEMBERS OBJECT

At least 50 members of the United States Congress have signed a letter to the Singapore Govt requesting the release or public trial of the 15 detainees. Another letter is circulating in Congress specifically dealing with the case of Ms Teo Soh Lung.

The US human rights organisation, Asia Watch, has circulated the 10 congress members who signed a June 15 letter to the Home Affairs Minister with an analysis of the Minister's reply, rebutting it point by point. It rejects Prof Jayakumar's justification of detention without trial as putting Singapore on a par with South Africa and Vietnam in its disregard of international principles and "an outrageous departure from the most elementary considerations of justice".

AMERICAN CHURCHES ALARMED

A July 23 letter to the Singapore Embassy in Washington from the National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA (representing the major Protestant denominations) rejected as "wholly unconvincing" the case against the detainees. In his letter, Assistant General Secretary Dwain C Epps said, "The deep concerns we expressed to your Prime Minister on 8th June are far from being allayed... We are, in fact, more alarmed than ever. Reports continue to come in of mistreatment of persons being detained for political reasons. It is difficult for observers abroad to accept as credible the word of your government in these cases so long as fair, public trials are refused the accused..." He concluded, "Our concerns, I reiterate, have not been allayed."

On the contrary, arrests continue and internationally accepted human rights norms and the rule of law are flaunted. We will

continue to follow these cases actively and with close attention. A copy of this letter is being provided to the U.S. Department of State."

OTHER ACTIONS IN US

In early July a petition against the detentions was started in Hawaii and quickly gained many signatures. A demonstration was held on August 3. The Chicago-based Church Committee for Human Rights in Asia publicised the detentions in its national publication The Asian Rights Advocate. Alumni of Harvard University who know Mr Chew Kheng Chuan have mobilised support for him.

US REACTION "MINIMAL"

During his meeting in Honolulu Ambassador Koh stated that the reaction in the US to detentions was minimal and that only about ten letters had been received. Owing to the extreme sensitivity of his govt to the US reaction, it is assumed he is making a gallant attempt at down-playing the reaction.

SUMMARY OF OTHER SUPPORT ACTIONS

SRI LANKA

Letter dated 9 July to Home Affairs Minister of Singapore signed by 30 religious (Christian and Buddhist), women's, peasants' workers', development, media, theatre and civil rights groups. It expressed "our abhorrence at the violation of elementary democratic and human rights in the continued detention of these persons without trial" and demanded their public trial or release. Also a letter dated 13 July to Archbishop Yong from the Christian Workers' Fellowship expressing "strong indignation and abhorrence over your recent actions" which "constitute nothing less than treachery to the flock committed to your charge". The Archbishop was called upon "to make reparation by at least tendering your resignation without delay".

JAPAN

In a press release dated August 9, the Kansai Emergency Committee for Human Rights in Singapore declared that it observed Singapore National day as a day of sorrow and protest in memory of the 15 detainees. 30 committee members held a 2-hour teach-in on the detentions and the Internal Security Act for the press and public in front of Singapore's Osaka Consulate. This action was followed by a colourfully postered protest parade through the city to the local offices of Singapore International Airlines (SIA). A letter was delivered announcing support for an international boycott of the airlines and of Singapore's tourist industry until the Govt begins to abide by the United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The march continued through the downtown area distributing pamphlets. The Committee also announced plans to lobby Japanese travel agents and booking offices to enforce the boycott.

Similar actions have been under way in Tokyo since July 18. SIA offices and shopping areas have been leafletted regularly.

PHILIPPINES

A letter writing campaign and petition have continued. A "phone barrage" of the Singapore Embassy has been organised. A newsletter and slide presentation are in production. Seminars are being held.

THAILAND

Concerned groups have held university seminars, organised visits to the Singapore Embassy, phone barrages and picketing of the embassy.

HONGKONG

The organising centre of the boycott, Hongkong groups have been very active. Recent activities include a press conference on July 16, picketing and leafletting of SIA offices since July 18. Suggested actions include "birthday cards" to Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew on his birthday, September 16.

Singapore's National Day was set as a day for messages of protest to be sent to the Singapore Govt. Many groups around the world have responded to this call from Hongkong, especially Catholic organisations.

Even prior to this campaign, organisations in Hongkong had organised 4 demonstrations at the Singapore diplomatic mission, 2 public meetings and sent some 80 letters of protest to Mr Lee Kuan Yew.

AUSTRALIA

On July 30 in St Mary's Cathedral, the Archbishop of Perth, the Most Rev W Foley, preached at a special mass for human rights in Singapore. The Archbishop is the chairperson of the new "Bishops' Committee on Justice and Development" which has replaced the Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace. On June 16 a Protest Vigil was held outside Wesley Church in Perth and many leaflets were distributed. The Australian Catholic press continues to give extensive coverage to the detentions.

In Sydney, a public meeting was held on June 18. The Singapore Airlines office was picketed on June 25. On 21 July, students along with TV reporters confronted Mr Barry Unsworth, Premier of New South Wales and a Catholic, at Sydney airport prior to his departure for Singapore. He brushed aside questions about the detainees. A public meeting was organised on 6 August at the Institute of Technology. Academics from law and political science addressed the meeting. Many Australian groups joined in the National Day protest message campaign.

An ecumenical prayer vigil was held at St Carthage's in Melbourne on 9 August to pray for the detainees.

CORRECTION: UPDATE 10 reported a mass in St Patrick's Cathedral,

Sydney on July 6, led by Bishop Bede Heather. It was St Patrick's Cathedral, PARRAMATTA.

AOTEAROA-NEW ZEALAND

The Catholic Commission for Evangelisation, Justice and Development has appealed for a national response to the Singapore National Day message of protest campaign. The Catholic Commission has had an exchange of correspondence with the Singapore High Commission. In its latest letter of 16 July, Catholic Commission executive John Egan stated, "The rights of the human person are too precious to be abused in the way that the Government of Singapore advocates."

On August 10, the Christchurch Catholic Commission for Justice and development sent a protest telex to Mr Lee Kuan Yew. University students' associations and ecumenical youth bodies have also been active in the campaign.

The Executive Committee of the National Council of churches resolved at its meeting July 3 to 5, to ask the NZ Govt "to use its influence to seek a trial in open court" for those detained. Prime Minister David Lange replied on 21 July saying that his deputy foreign minister had "made known to the Singapore Government NZ's reservations about the detention without trial of these people". These representations "were reinforced during the recent visit to NZ by a Singapore government MP, Dr Lau Teik Soon, who was questioned at length about the detentions.."

Mr Lange concluded, "I am continuing to watch closely developments concerning the detentions and will be interested to see the report of the International Mission of Jurists on their recent visit to Singapore".

On 18 July, NZ's non-govt aid and development agency CORSO sent a protest letter to the Singapore Home Affairs Minister stating that the Internal Security Act is "fundamentally undemocratic" and "an attack on the right of all people to openly face their accusers and to defend themselves".

Recently honoured NZ author, Ms Elsie Locke, wrote a letter to Mr Lee Kuan Yew on 8 August stating, "To imprison people because their opinions are thought to be inconvenient to the Government in power is to make strides away from democracy towards dictatorship. It would be difficult for New Zealanders to maintain friendly relations with your government in this situation."

EMERGENCY COMMITTEE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS IN SINGAPORE (NZ)
P O Box 28-100, Christchurch, Aotearoa-New Zealand

Repression Is Like Making Love

In October 1956, Mr. Lee Kuan Yew (at that time opposition leader) made a celebrated speech in Parliament in which he deplored the arbitrary arrest of trade union and civil leaders by the British colonialists under the draconian Internal Security Act.

Today that speech stands as an ironic tribute to Mr. Lee Kuan Yew vis-a-vis the 16 Singapore detainees (plus the 4 who were detained earlier). In outlining how government could fall all too easily into the habit of suppressing the liberty of the individual, Lee said:

"First the conscience is attacked by a sense of guilt. You attack only those whom your Special Branch can definitely say are communists. They have no proof except that X told Z who told Alpha who told Beta who told the Special Branch. Then you attack those whom your Special Branch say are actively sympathising with and helping the communists, although they are not communists themselves. Then you attack those whom your Special Branch say, although they are not communists or fellow travellers, yet, by their intransigent opposition to any collaboration with colonialism, they encourage the spirit of revolt and weaken constituted authority and thereby, according to the Special Branch, they are aiding the communists. Then finally, since you have gone that far, you attack all those who oppose you.

"...All you have to do is to dissolve organisations and societies and banish or detain the key political workers in these societies. Then miraculously everything is tranquil and quiet on the surface. Then an intimidated press and some sections of the press here do not need intimidation because they have friendly owners—the press and the government-controlled radio toge-

ther can regularly sing your praises and slowly and steadily the people are made to forget the evil things that have already been done. Or if these things are referred to again, they are conveniently distorted, and distorted with impunity, because there will be no opposition to contradict."

"...But if we say we believe in democracy, if we say that the fabric of a democratic society is one which allows the free play of ideas, which avoids revolution by violence because revolution by peaceful methods of persuasion is allowed, then in the name of all the gods we have in this country, give that free play a chance to work within the constitutional framework."

To put it bluntly, repression for Mr. Lee Kuan Yew is like making love.

"I'm told it is like making love — It's always easier the second time. The first time there may be pangs of conscience, a sense of guilt. But once embarked on this course, with constant repetition, you get more and more brazen in the attack and in the scope of the attack."

He became, has remained and is continuing to prove a striking example of what he was then condemning ●

Excerpt from T.J.S. George,
LEE KUAN YEW'S SINGAPORE,
Andre' Deutsch Ltd., London, 1973.

Twisted logic

I do not think any modern government, even if fairly elected into power, has the right to arrest anybody it dislikes, call them names, imprison them without trial, and then justify all these by getting elected again in the next election, which seems to be the logic of the Singapore Government and the writers of Unwanted advice [LETTERS, 16 July].

There are things called basic human rights, and even elected governments must be prepared to be criticised, by nationals and foreigners alike, when they trample upon them.

And of course they will get elected again and again when any potentially viable opposition is "nipped in the bud," deprived of the right of reply to the smear campaign in the controlled media, and barred from any political activities on release. A wave of arrests some time before a general election has been a recurring phenomenon in Singapore. The ruling party used to say that "the opposition is hopeless" and then lament over the lack of sparring partners, after they had put all the hopefuls behind bars without trial.

But more than 30% of the Singapore electorate still risked their "peace and stability" by casting their votes on relatively unknown people who were still around to run as opposition candidates in the last election. This has prompted

Lee Kuan Yew to suggest reviewing the one-man-one-vote system.

Even a fairly elected government has only a limited mandate to rule. The right to violate basic human rights cannot be part of that mandate, because all following elections will not be fair any longer, leaving the "elected" government with no mandate at all.

If the present Singapore Government is returned again in the next election, it cannot justify anything unless all those detained without trial have their freedom and all their political rights restored long beforehand.

Singapore Tsui Hon Kwong

6 AUGUST 1987 • FAR EASTERN ECONOMIC REVIEW

(HONG KONG)