



Emergency committee for human rights
in Singapore

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SINGAPORE HUMAN RIGHTS ALERT

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ANOTHER ROUND OF INTERROGATION. LEGAL REPRESENTATIONS HEARD.
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VINCENT SUBJECT TO ANOTHER ROUND OF INTERROGATION

Despite his "confession" Mr Vincent Cheng, the former executive secretary of the Justice and Peace Commission of Singapore Archdiocese, is now subjected to yet another round of interrogation. It is believed to be another desperate move by the Internal Security Department (ISD) in attempting to extract more information from the detainees to close the credibility gap in their "Marxist conspiracy" theory.

Vincent Cheng is now considering filing his legal representations and may be writing the representations himself.

LEGAL REPRESENTATIONS HEARD

Legal representations from 5 of the 15 detainees have now been heard by the Advisory Board headed by Judge Sinnathuray, the judge who convicted Mr TAN Wah Piow on political charges in 1974. Representations from Ms TEO Soh Lung and Ms TANG Fong Har were heard on 15 August; those from Mr CHEW Kheng Chuan, Mr Kevin DE SOUZA and Ms CHNG Suan Tze were heard on 29 August.

After the hearing of the representations, the Advisory Board will make its recommendations to the President, within three months of the date of their detention orders, its decision on their continued detention or release. The Board's decision on the case of Ms TEO Soh Lung is expected before 21 September.

FILING OF WRITS DISCOURAGED

On knowing that Ms TEO Soh Lung was going to file legal proceedings challenging her detention without trial, both the Director and Deputy Director of the ISD came to the prison to persuade Ms TEO not to do so. Ms TEO was told that she may be released in September, and was given the impression that filing a writ against her detention may endanger her chance of early release.

However, relatives and friends are concerned that it may just be a delaying tactic by ISD to avoid drawing more attention from the international community on the human rights situation in Singapore.

JEYARETNAM AND TAN WAH PIOW HOLD JOINT PRESS CONFERENCE

Mr J B Jeyaretnam, the Secretary-General of the Singapore Workers' Party, and Mr Tan Wah Piow held a joint press conference at St James's Church, Piccadilly, London on August 7. They each issued a statement on the recent detentions in Singapore.

INFILTRATION THEORY DISMISSED

At the said press conference, Mr Jeyaretnam dismissed the Singapore Government's allegations that Tan Wah Piow had infiltrated and planned to use the Workers' Party to overthrow the government by violence. He referred to Tan as "a man dedicated to constitutional change" and said the Workers' Party "welcomes help from all who wish to bring about a democratic state through constitutional means via the ballot box. The government equates this help with infiltration - an emotive term that has overtones of a sinister purpose."

GOVERNMENT'S BANKRUPT CASE

Mr Jeyaretnam further revealed that he had read copies of Tan Wah Piow's letters to Mr Chia Boon Tai, from which the government published extracts to support its allegations of Tan being the mastermind behind a Marxist conspiracy. "Having read the full text of the letters," he said, "I cannot find in them any evidence which would suggest that Tan was plotting a conspiracy to overthrow the government by resort to violence. In the main, the letters reveal Tan's anxiety about the impending loss of his citizenship and the options that are open to him to avoid the deprivation of his citizenship. The government in its usual fashion has chosen to publish isolated sentences taken out of their context. This is a clear indication that the government itself does not believe its allegations, and realises that if the full text of the letters were released the public will see what a bankrupt case the government has against Tan."

OPPORTUNITY TO REPLY DEPRIVED

Mr Jeyaretnam alleged that by preventing Singaporeans from being able to buy Tan's book, "Let the People Judge", in Singapore the government is showing its "all too familiar tactic to accuse persons and then deprive them of an adequate opportunity to reply."

REAL MESSAGE OF THE ARRESTS

In a separate press statement, Mr Tan Wah Piow observed that "while the government is encountering a severe credibility crisis over the arrests, it has, at the same time, temporarily succeeded in imposing a climate of fear right across the island." The real message of these arrests, Tan claimed, was "that if any Singaporean goes against the PAP (the ruling Peoples' Action Party), the government will not hesitate to fabricate any excuse to persecute him, without regard to what people inside Singapore may say, or what the rest of the world may think."

BOOK TO DEFEAT THE GOVERNMENT'S CLAIMS

At the press conference, Tan presented a copy of his book, "Let the People Judge", to Mr Jeyaretnam. Given the fact that the Singapore media has chosen to ignore his published rebuttals, Tan appealed to the Workers' Party to help in the process of publicising the book to the Singapore public. The book, according to Tan, was "intended to defeat the government's claim of a 'marxist conspiracy'. Once that claim collapses, the government will be left devoid of any moral or political excuse for the continued detention of the fifteen political prisoners."

SENIOR MINISTER LASHED AT INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY'S DISQUIET

On 26 June, Mr S. Rajaratnam, the Senior Minister in the Prime Minister's Office, revealed that more than 200 organisations from the world over had protested against the recent detentions. The growing disquiet in the international community over the last two months has again prompted the Senior Minister to lash out at the international community. At his speech entitled "Is God a Liberation Theologian" to students at the National University of Singapore on 14 August, he said, "There are many non-communist and even anti-communist Congressmen and Western Parliamentarians and human rights buffs who are ready to throw a protective ring around the disguised Marxists."

SUPERB MARXIST MAGIC

Referring to criticisms that the 22 people arrested in the plot were not Marxists but honest, democratic critics of the PAP, the Senior Minister said it was a measure of the skill and sophistication of the new Marxists that they could "get the wolf accepted by the sheep as a vegetarian animal just like them". Mr Rajaratnam called this the "superb Marxist magic", and added that it would take a long time to "break its spell".

Mr Rajaratnam also warned the Singaporean public that "the Marxist threat is not over" and they should not "underestimate the recuperating powers of this hydra-headed monster".

PRIME MINISTER REITERATED THE DANGER OF MARXIST THREAT

The significance of the disquiet in both the local and international community can be gauged from the fact that, on 16 August, Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew in his National Day Rally speech (which was telecast live over two of the television channels and lasted 2 hours and 40 minutes) warned of the disastrous consequences of mixing religion with politics and the "very difficult and sensitive issue of the Marxists using the Catholic Church as cover". This is the second time he addressed the nation on the theme of religion and Marxist threat; a week ago on 9 August, the PM spoke on the same theme in his National Day speech.

HARBOUR NO ILLUSION, CLERGY WARNED

The Prime Minister had some very strong words for any clergy who contemplates "social action". He warned that Catholic priests and Christian pastors who returned from studies overseas where the Church was a political force should harbour no illusion about going beyond religious activities into "social action". "Once religion crosses the line and goes into what they call 'social action', including liberation theology, then we are opening up a Pandora's Box in Singapore." The PM also spelt out his government's reaction to such transgression by adding that no government was going to stand by and not defend itself when religious groups started to venture into its turf.

"LEAVE LITTLE TO CHANCE", THAT IS THE WAY WE RUN SINGAPORE

In rationalising the Government's actions, the PM put forward the thesis that it was an enormous task to make a nation out of so many diverse communities. Nothing should be left to chance. Illustrating with a Chinese proverb which said no one could foretell whether an event would turn out good or ill, then "leave as little to chance as possible," advised the PM. "That's the way my colleagues and I have run Singapore. That's the way I advise you to continue doing it."

DEPUTY PM ECHOED THE SAME WARNING

A week after the Prime Minister spoke of the Marxist threat at the National Day Rally, the Deputy Prime Minister Mr GOH Chok Tong, from the second echelon leadership, echoed a similar warning to the Singapore public. Speaking at his Marine Parade

constituency's National Day dinner, the Deputy PM said his Cabinet colleagues would seek the views of religious leaders to "convince them that the Government was doing the right thing for Singapore".

GURKHAS STAGED 'RIOT' FOR THE PRESIDENT

In attempting to impress and to make "real" to the public the dreadful scene of a riot, 61 Gurkha policemen flanked by an armoured van and 2 transport vehicles staged a mock "riot" for President Wee Kim Wee at their Mount Vernon base on 20 August. In the anti-riot demonstration, molotov cocktails were hurled and "walls of fire and smoke" were reported "to have flared up from the ground".

THE ENEMY BEYOND

To further hike up the sense of a threat to the nation, on 24 August THE STRAITS TIMES devoted two pages to excerpts from a book by Robert Tilman, highlighting the threat to Singapore from the "enemy beyond". It is rather telling that the Government chose to give such prominence to Tilman's book "Southeast Asia and the Enemy Beyond" in the Singapore's media and at this "trying" time.

COMMITTEE CHAIRMEN OF THE US CONGRESS SIGNED PROTEST LETTER
UPDATE has now received from the US human rights organisation, Asia Watch, the full details of the protest letter issued by members of the US Congress .

55 members of the U.S. House of Representatives had, on 12 August, issued a letter of protest to the government of Singapore condemning the recent detentions and urged that "the detainees either be tried promptly or released."

Concerning the government's decision to forego trials in these cases, the members of Congress said: "We recognize that the right to trial may in certain circumstances be suspended under international law. We note, however, that your government has not suggested that the accepted requirement for such a suspension -- 'a public emergency that threatens the life of the nation' -- exists in these cases."

The bipartisan letter was signed by many senior members of the U.S. Congress, including the Chairmen of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, the House Budget Committee and the House Judiciary Subcommittee on Civil and Constitutional Rights. The letter was initiated by Rep. Ted Weiss, a member of the Foreign Affairs Committee from New York.

MINIMAL U.S. REACTION STATEMENT CONTRADICTED

Contrary to the "minimal US reaction" statement by Mr Tommy KOH (Singapore's Ambassador to the US), Asia Watch program director Mr Eric Schwartz has this to say: "It is highly gratifying to see so much interest in the House of Representatives on this important human rights issue. We hope that the Congressional letter encourages the government of Singapore to reconsider its actions in these cases."

JAPAN DIET MEMBERS SEEK FAIR TRIAL FOR THE DETAINEES

In a joint letter to the Prime Minister of Singapore, 14 Members of the Japan Diet (Parliament) wrote, "...it would be greatly appreciated, if you could release all the detainees unconditionally and lift the conditions imposed on the others. If, in fact, they are suspected of committing some criminal act, we believe that an open and fair trial should be granted to all of them equally."

KOREAN CHURCHES DRAW PARALLELS FOR THE SINGAPORE DETENTIONS

On 7 August, the Human Rights Committee of the National Council Churches in Korea expressed their concern for the detainees and drew parallels in what is happening in Singapore with their own experience in Korea under President Chun Doo Hwan. Their statement said, "Our concern stems from our experience that these crackdowns are measures intended to terrorise the church away from the work for justice and social transformation. Our experience tells us that this kind of crackdown is only the beginning of harsh repression aiming to exterminate all forms of human action for liberation and justice. Our work for human rights and justice in Korea began with similar suffering."

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