



Emergency committee for human rights
in Singapore _____

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SINGAPORE HUMAN RIGHTS ALERT

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Bringing in the Vatican Shock Troops
MIND-BENDERS SET ON TO VINCENT CHENG

Father Peres, an Opus Dei priest, has been visiting detainee Mr Vincent Cheng regularly in his secret police prison. Opus Dei (God's Work) is an organisation within the Catholic Church founded by Fr Jose-Maria Escriva de Balaguer on October 2, 1928 in Spain. It flourished under fascism, giving Franco's rule messianic overtones. It has been a controversial organisation owing to its secrecy, its very conservative theology and its deep involvement on the right wing of politics in many countries. Previously regarded as a kind of Catholic Freemasonry, it has received official recognition from the present Pope. It is now aggressively penetrating many established Catholic structures, educational institutions, powerful business interests and political lobbies. It recently took over the Catholic Students' Society at the National University of Singapore.

As Vincent Cheng is a strong Christian with a mild, self-effacing and tolerant attitude, he is unlikely to be swayed by the heavy political arguments and appeals to self-interest characteristic of the secret police. Perhaps now the Singapore Govt is hoping to undermine his theological views by setting an Opus Dei priest on to him. He has been under psychological pressure since May 21, 1987 and is held under laboratory conditions so there may be some grounds for the Govt's hopes. However, Vincent also assisted with a Church and Society publication in 1986 which included a series of exposes on Opus Dei entitled "Opus Dei - Revelations of an Elite Battalion" so he is aware of their mind-bending tactics.

* Jim Anderson M.P. * Jocelyn Armstrong * Katie Boanas * Prof J Burrows * Very Rev Dr Alan Brash * Jan Cornsack * Fr John Curnow * Sonja Davies M.P. * Manuka Henare * Canon Hone Kaa *
* Michael Knowles * Margaret Lovell-Smith * Archdeacon Alan McKenzie * Sir Guy Powles * Rev Barbara Stephens * Rev David M Taylor * Bishop Whakahuiri Vercoe *

THE EMBARRASSING TRUTH

As reported in the previous Update (Dec 21), Fr Edgar D'Souza resigned his priesthood after a dirty, personal campaign against him by the Singapore Govt. As part of his reply to the Govt, he released records of the meeting between a Catholic delegation (including the Catholic Archbishop of Singapore, Gregory Yong) and Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew. The records are Fr D'Souza's notes taken as the Archbishop and other delegation members gave a subsequent account of the meeting to priests, plus notes of related events and statements of Yong.

The records make it clear that, as Update reported at the time, the Catholic delegation were brow-beaten by the Prime Minister and the Archbishop felt "cornered" when a press conference with the PM was sprung on him without warning. In addition only an edited version of the Archbishop's words, which did not reflect his full position, was broadcast on national TV that evening. The records also show that some members of the delegation regarded the confrontation with the PM as an attack against the Catholic Church.

FAR EASTERN ECONOMIC REVIEW CHOPPED

These allegations by D'Souza were reported in the Hongkong-based Far Eastern Economic Review of 17 December, 1987 in the same way that it has reported govt allegations against the detainees and the priests. On 26 December the Singapore Govt declared the Review to be "a foreign newspaper engaging in the domestic politics of Singapore" and cut its circulation to 500 copies to be marked and circulated as directed by the govt. The Review responded by withdrawing its entire circulation saying that it had, in practice, been banned and would not allow the Govt to have control over its circulation.

The Govt-controlled STRAITS TIMES began a sustained attack on the Review devoting many column inches and headlines to the issue over subsequent days. PM Lee Kuan Yew has fulminated against the Review and brought charges for defamation. The Review has refused to apologise and has denied his charges. The matter is now before the Singapore courts. The Review has just been given a two week extension in which to file its defence. Since the Govt exercises such heavy control of the judiciary it is unlikely that the Review, with the best case in the world, can clear itself of the charges. In the meantime it has withdrawn its printing operation from Singapore.

The discomfort and anger of the govt is partly due to the truth receiving such wide currency. The govt has also claimed to allow press freedom provided official rebuttals are published in full. To its embarrassment, its bluff has been called by the Review and this policy has been shown to be hollow. TIME magazine, Asiaweek and the Asian Wall Street Journal were banned because they refused to give acres of space to official replies to their

articles on Singapore. . But the Review has faithfully given space to every Singapore Govt letter it received and published them unedited, partly, as Review editor Derek Davies said, "because we believe the government has a right to reply; we printed them partly also because their content and tone revealed more about the mentality of Singapore officialdom than could the most gifted journalist." Even having the unrestricted right of reply, the Singapore Govt has been unable to take the heat of the truth coming out.

THE ELECTION WALTZ

The govt seems to have decided on a probable election strategy. Its recent actions in a number of fields point to an election this year, possibly in the mid-year school holidays. The indications are:

- Vincent Cheng was told last year he would be let out in March this year. In the last few days this was changed to June.

- In a highly unusual conciliatory gesture to public disquiet the govt has delayed the introduction of a controversial amendment to the constitution. The bill changing the voting system and introducing the Group Representation Constituencies (GRCs) has been referred to a select committee. The change was being cynically sold as a way to ensure minority representation in parliament (Malay and Indian) but was really a way to ensure that few, if any, opposition members get elected even if the government's share of the total vote declines further.

Clearly stung by the popular view that this was its real motive, the govt released papers back to 1982 to prove that its original motive was to guarantee minority representation. Singaporeans are now expected to believe that the "younger leaders" and the Malay leaders did not at first agree with the PM in 1982 but, when finally talked around, did not present the real reason for their proposal to the public for fear of inciting racial tension.

What is more likely is that the govt was surprised by the strongly negative grassroots reaction to the GRC proposal and had to cast about for an alibi. The 1982 discussion on minority representation supplies that alibi because, having intentionally broken up tightly-knit Malay villages and peppered them through the high-rise housing estates, the govt realised they were in danger of disappearing altogether from the facade of parliamentary politics. A public relations strategy was considered in order to bring a few more Malay faces into the govt line-up.

In addition, the PM's obsession with eugenics has caused him to tinker with racial social engineering at all levels and he has tinkered once too often. By seizing this alibi and "admitting" to it, the govt encouraged communal self-interest and lifted the lid off racial feeling. Some responded to the GRC proposal

saying that it enshrined racism while others made a bid for their share (Muslim Indians and Eurasians felt left out).

Making a virtue out of necessity and with one eye to the next elections, the govt has now dived for the cover of a select committee.

- On February 5 the govt-run National Trades Union Congress (its head is a cabinet minister) organised a genteel demonstration of 4,500 workers (placards supplied) at the Singapore Conference Centre. It is said that workers were given a \$5 "transport fee" to attend. A small delegation delivered a "strongly-worded protest letter to the US Embassy". The rally condemned the US decision to remove Singapore from its Generalised System of Preferences (GSP) which gave 700 Singapore products duty-free entry to the US on the basis that Singapore was a developing country.

This decision has been expected for some years and Singapore has made only a token protest: it sent a low-ranked minister to the US to complain. However, the hype in the local media and the fake demonstration will enable the govt to develop further the siege mentality that total support behind the govt is needed in hard times. Any economic hardships felt by ordinary workers can now be placed at the feet of the US and not the govt. It is certainly looking like an election year.

INTERNATIONAL CHRISTIAN BODY EXPELLED

As predicted in the previous Update, the govts of Singapore and Malaysia have taken another step in fabricating their conspiracy theory about Christian organisations.

On December 30, the secret police entered the offices of the Christian Conference of Asia, an ecumenical body with more than 100 member churches and councils from all over Asia (including the Anglican and Methodist churches of Singapore), and informed the staff that CCA was officially dissolved under Singapore law, that the entire office and its contents were now under seal, its accounts were frozen and all executive staff had 2 weeks to leave the country.

With such a massive amount of archives, files and other records at its disposal the Singapore govt will be able to fabricate any story it wishes and find a supporting letter or memo. It is likely that material from this office will be used throughout the security services of ASEAN countries to crush human rights groups and other forms of democratic dissent especially by Christians.

Although CCA had its headquarters and 7 departments in Singapore, it also has 2 departments based in Hongkong and so is using Hongkong as its temporary headquarters.

Protests at the expulsion have been made by churches from all over the world. However, CCA itself has taken a low-key approach and is now re-organising in order to continue its work.

The most remarkable reaction to the expulsion came from the national member council from Indonesia which stated that it supported the Singapore govt's action and agreed that CCA had moved away from its religious aims into politics. There has been a continuing debate within the Asian churches (and thus CCA) over human rights questions in Indonesia and also its 1975 invasion of East Timor. However, this debate has always been carried out within the fellowship and never in public. This breaking of ranks by the Indonesian Christian council to endorse a repressive act against its own collegial body is a major fracture in Asian inter-church relations.

MALAYSIA-SINGAPORE COOPERATION

Cooperation between the two govts in crushing democratic dissent using the Internal Security Act has been obvious from the beginning. The expulsion of the CCA was followed by the serving of 2-year detention orders on many of the Malaysian detainees including those who were assisting in the campaign to free the Singapore detainees. In several orders (e.g. those of Ms CHEE Heng Leng and Dr NASIR) CCA is outlandishly termed "a body infiltrated by the International Communist United Front".

It is also said that the relations between Malaysian PM, Dr Mahathir, and PM Lee Kuan Yew were very warm and friendly at the ASEAN summit in Manila 14-15 December compared to the Vancouver Commonwealth meeting a few months previously. Malaysia's copycat repressive actions were clearly seen as a blow for ASEAN solidarity.

THE ECONOMIST'S FAREWELL BLAST

The prestigious UK-based business magazine THE ECONOMIST has moved its bureau and correspondent out of Singapore to Hongkong in response to the new repressiveness of the govt. In a farewell blast reprinted in THE PRESS (Christchurch, NZ, 26 Jan) entitled "Mr Lee overdoes the role of lone strongman", the editorial condemns the arrests last year and also the restrictions on the foreign press. It concludes: "Mr Lee has spent most of the past quarter-century being right. Now he is wrong."

DRAMATIC REQUEST DENIED

Semi-released detainee Ms Wong Souk Yee, accountancy graduate and senior research executive, recently applied to the secret police to be allowed to rejoin the Third Stage drama group. The request has been denied.

BILAHARI BACK HOME

When last sighted, diplomat and propagandist Mr Bilahari Kausikan who was first secretary at Singapore's Washington embassy, was back home in Singapore. Perhaps his aggressive propagandising and his economy with the truth finally made him a negative asset in Singapore's relations with Capitol Hill.

SECRET POLICE CHIEF'S FINAL OPERATION?

The notoriously sadistic former deputy director of the Internal Security Dept, Mr C H Lim, was recently operated on for both coronary occlusion and cancer.

CAMBRIDGE COLLEGE PUTS CASH BEFORE PRINCIPLES?

The previous Update reported that PM Lee's old college, Fitzwilliam, was exploring the possibility of its student body adopting detainee Chia Thye Poh as an honorary member. He has been in a Singapore prison since 1966.

Not surprisingly the proposal was not received with universal acclaim as the college is said to have received substantial donations from Singapore.

A meeting of the Fitzwilliam Junior Members Assn in late January adopted Mr Chia in order to campaign for his release. However, the decision was later overturned by the Junior Members Committee at which a Fellow was present. PM Lee is also a Fellow. However, Mr Chia's supporters led by Kat Quarmby and Cambridge University Student President, Sian Griffiths, are not discouraged by this temporary setback and are continuing their efforts.

MORE PRESS COMMENT

On 28 December 1987, Hongkong's major English daily the SOUTH CHINA MORNING POST delivered a stinging editorial "Singapore's tarnished record on censorship". It condemned Singapore's draconian press laws, criticised Mr Lee's use of the media as a propaganda tool and said that "the government which has eradicated litter and ended poverty by edict has also denied its citizens the right to know the unadulterated truth". It concluded that "the accomplishments of the past 23 years of independence could have been realised without the sacrifices of all the major freedoms of which the freedom of information is the first and foremost".

On 2 January 1988, NZ's major daily, the NZ HERALD, ran an editorial headed "Singapore Harasses the Press" in which it condemned the restrictions on foreign media, particularly the Far Eastern Economic Review, calling the govt's rationalisation for its action "nonsense". It also noted that "any government that deems itself the final repository or arbiter of either fact or opinion displays a dangerously exalted state of mind".

The Cambridge Political Review, UK, in its Michaelmas issue last year, contained an interview of Asia Watch (Washington DC) staff Mr Eric Schwartz. The interview was conducted by Cambridge law student, Singaporean Marc Lim. It is sub-titled "If human rights is not the business of the international community, what is?"

EMERGENCY COMMITTEE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS IN SINGAPORE
P O BOX 28-100, Christchurch, Aotearoa-New Zealand.

THE ECONOMIST (reprinted in THE PRESS, Christchurch, NZ 26 Jan 1988)

THE Singapore that Mr Lee Kuan Yew led to independence in 1965 was a run-down island whose racially divided people spoke four official languages, had a gross domestic product per head of \$NZ785, and were not many years beyond a terrorist campaign that could have left them ruled by communists.

For the next 20 years the economy grew by almost 8 per cent a year. Singaporeans now have a G.D.P. per head above \$NZ10,770, higher than New Zealand's, which they enjoy in a clean and stable place where race riots and guerrillas are dim memories. Mr Lee, the only Prime Minister Singapore has had, has a lot to be proud of.

His pride may, however, be turning into the sort that goes before some unpleasant and avoidable things. The evidence has been piling up for the past year that Mr Lee thinks the whip-crack of his well-informed authority is still the way to drive Singapore forward.

His country's success ought to be convincing him that a lot more political and civil freedom — including the freedom of even the less well-informed to make their own decisions — is what Singapore really needs.

The Prime Minister's unwillingness to brook dissent has been most visible in the Government's slaps at the foreign press. In just over a year it has restricted the circulation in Singapore of "Time," the "Asian Wall Street Journal," "Asla Week," and most recently, the "Far Eastern Economic Review."

The absurd box in which this campaign has trapped the Government was illuminated by the bill it introduced in Parliament last week. Singapore's ambition to be a regional business centre demands that the information in foreign publications be available, impertinent though Mr Lee often finds them.

So Singapore is creating a sort of official *samizdat*, the new bill will suspend the country's copyright law to allow photocopied versions of restricted publications to be circulated in Singapore, though not for profit, when the real thing cannot.

Journalists always complain. What then, of the attack on a cell of alleged Marxists bent, the Government says, on overthrowing it?

The arrests of 22 people, including several Roman Catholics whose main offence seems to have been confused thinking about economics, were accom-

panied by a blitz of televised "documentaries" and confessions, but since they were detained without trial, by not a single independent test of the validity of the accusations. The conventional Opposition has got off no easier.

Alarmed by the fall in his share of the vote from 75 per cent in 1980 to 63 per cent in 1984 (when the Opposition captured two of Parliament's 79 seats), Mr Lee's Government proposed a constitutional amendment last month that will replace single-member constituencies with multi-member ones. A way of ensuring representation of racial minorities, it explains.

It is also likely to ensure that not a single Opposition member is returned in the next election.

Mr Lee, perhaps because he is a genuinely far-seeing man, has always had an authoritarian touch. But Singapore is not the sad place it was when the Prime Minister began confidently calling all the shots in the mid-1960s.

Singaporeans are not only richer: they are better-educated, better-travelled, mostly fluent in English, less prey to strong racial feeling. The Government has recognised in its privatisation and financial-liberalisation programmes that Singaporeans need

more economic elbow-room for their growth, but it wants their social and political behaviour to remain swaddled.

The argument is often made, rightly, that sooner or later this stifles the creativity that allows rich countries to become even richer. There is more to it than that. Political and civil liberties are a good in themselves, which people tend to want more of.

This seems to be an even harder proposition for Mr Lee to accept than it has been for many other Asian authoritarians, from Manila to Seoul, who have had it

forced on them over the past two years. He has overmastered Singapore's politics for so long that there is no effective counterweight to his intellect and personality.

But one man's decisions, however brilliant he is, cannot in the end predict the future more accurately than the collective decisions of a countryful of not all that much duller people making their own individual choices.

Mr Lee has spent most of the past quarter-century being right. Now he is wrong.

Copyright — The Economist

SINGAPORE likes to project itself as the citadel of democracy in Southeast Asia. But the glory of that edifice is tarnished by its draconian press laws which are every bit as stern as those enacted by authoritarian states. Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew has now ordered the sales of the *Far Eastern Economic Review* slashed by 90 per cent, an effective ban on the publication in Singapore. Such censorship through punitive circulation control has become routine in Singapore, with *Time* magazine, *Asian Wall Street Journal* and *Asiaweek* suffering a similar fate over the past year or so. The loss to these publications in circulation and financial terms is significant but this pales against the damage done to Singaporeans and their supposed right to free and reliable information.

Mr Lee, who has often impressed Western heads of state with his grasp of ideas and astuteness, loathes, yet dreads, the free foreign media which are not so enamoured of his patriarchal style or awed by Singapore's veneer of order and cleanliness. Besides crude press gags, Mr Lee's Government has made it a sport to expel correspondents who wish to present all sides of the story of Equatorial Eden. Today, foreign publications are avidly read in a city with nearly 100 per cent English literacy, thus exposing the dearth of international credibility of a local press pushed into subservience by an administration that has unabashedly treated the media as a propaganda tool. If censorship of local publications is a problem, self-censorship is an even greater fear, as those in positions of responsibility attempt to "second guess" the thoughts of the administration.

Since independence, Singapore has studiously copied Western technology and law but has filtered out what it abhors as foreign decadence. Far from an ideal hybrid of the East and the West, the Government that has eradicated litter and ended poverty by edict has also denied its citizens the right to know the unadulterated truth:

Because the city is an international financial centre whose prosperity depends mainly on the acumen of its people, it is open to many currents of ideas and streams of information. Indeed, the anomaly of a dynamic society functioning as if it were an authoritarian fiefdom cannot be sustained indefinitely, whatever the craft and legerdemain of the Government which does not see its limitations and does not want others to discern its many foibles.

Many foreign journals may be inconvenienced but they are not intimidated by Singapore's ad-

vantage as a publishing and press distribution centre of Southeast Asia. To continue to flourish in the information age, Singapore needs both unfettered internal, and external media to keep it abreast of developments and views. It was therefore somewhat ironical that earlier this month the *Straits Times* published commentaries ruing the coming demise of press freedoms in Hongkong as well as the alleged mass exodus of talent from the territory which Singapore has been eager to lure, largely in vain. While it is true that the spectre of the dramatic change of sovereignty in 1997 is daunting for many, especially those in the media, it would seem that many areas of the local press have never been more daring. Singapore has a lot to learn from Hongkong, starting with respect for the press, which is integral to administration respect for the citizenry. Mr Lee's foreign press bashing has been translated by his sometimes sycophantic domestic media to be a form of revenge against Western cultural arrogance and a vindication of Singaporeans' economic achievements. The fear of criticism and the truth has often blinded brilliant men to their flaws, their Achilles' heel, among whom Mr Lee must be counted. No foreign publication to date has doubted the splendour that is the new Singapore which should be held up as a model for many developing societies, its harsh laws notwithstanding. Mr Lee has presented his people with a stark choice of his way or no way, wealth or poverty, progress or backwardness, when in fact the accomplishments of the past 23 years of independence could have been realised without the sacrifices of all the major freedoms; of which the freedom of information is the first and foremost. Quite often Mr Lee would muse on the reasons why his clever countrymen, of whom 80 per cent are ethnic Chinese, cannot be as imaginative or creative as Westerners who, despite being "unruly", are the inventors of the sciences and technology the East is struggling to emulate and one day to supersede. The secret of the Western lead in research and the arts is not accidental or genetic, as Mr Lee is inclined to fantasise, but rather it is the Occidental world's appreciation of the need for its citizens to think and express themselves freely. Instead of clamping down on the press as Mr Lee is wont to do, he should unshackle the domestic media and encourage the circulation of foreign publications that have done well to inform Singaporeans of what really goes on in their beloved little country.

South China Morning Post

Founded in 1903

MONDAY, DECEMBER 28, 1987

Singapore's tarnished
record on censorship