



Emergency committee for human rights in Singapore

UPDATE NO. 19
SINGAPORE HUMAN RIGHTS ALERT

25 APRIL 1988

DETAINEES HELD INCOMMUNICADO. ILL-TREATMENT REPORT & HABAEUS
CORPUS WRITS FILED. LAWYER SPEAKS OUT. EX-DETAINEE IN BBC
INTERVIEW. MASS HELD. ARCHBISHOP'S GAME CLEARER. SECRET POLICE
EXPLOIT INNOCENCE. A MILKSHAKE IN PICCADILLY. WHAT TO EXPECT.
INTERNATIONAL REACTION.

STILL HELD INCOMMUNICADO

The 8 rearrested ex-detainees and their former defence lawyer are still being held incommunicado as of 25 April, 7 days after their arrest. Internal Security Dept (ISD) officers are still telling the detainees' families that they will be told in writing at a later date where the detainees are and when they can see them. Some families have threatened to file a missing persons report with the police.

OPEN LETTER TO SECRET POLICE

On April 23 the families issued an open letter to the Director of Internal Security (who has always been "out" when they tried to contact him) asking to know the whereabouts and circumstances of their loved ones. The news of this letter was carried on the BBC World Service on Sunday, 24 April.

ILL-TREATMENT REPORT FILED

Mr TEO Eng Seng, well-known artist and teacher and brother of detained lawyer Ms Teo Soh Lung, has filed a police report concerning the ill-treatment of Ms TEO when she was previously under detention. This is a response to the govt taunts that no complaint had been laid regarding torture or ill-treatment. Two police stations refused to accept the report but a third, Tanglin, accepted it before they realised what it was.

HABAEUS CORPUS WRITS

A writ of habaeus corpus has been filed on behalf of Ms TEO Soh Lung and is set down for hearing on 6 May. A writ for detained defence lawyer Mr Patrick SEONG will be filed today, Monday 25 April. It is likely that Ms TEO will also seek a judicial review of both her arrests since she maintains that the actions against her since May 21 last year have been without legal justification.

VINCENT CHENG ALSO INCOMMUNICADO AGAIN

Subsequent to the April 19 arrests of the 8 ex-detainees and their lawyer, Vincent's family have had their visits to him

* Jim Anderton M.P. * Jocelyn Armstrong * Katie Boanas * Prof J Burrows * Very Rev Dr Alan Bush * Jan Cormack * Fr John Currow * Sonja Davies M.P. * Muzuka Hanzu * Canon Hone Ka *

* Michael Knowles * Margaret Lovell-Smith * Archdeacon Alan McKenzie * Sir Guy Powles * Rev Barbara Stephens * Rev David M Taylor * Bishop Whakamini Vercos *

indefinitely terminated. The ISD gave the excuse that they are too busy with the "other cases". He is probably under interrogation himself.

STATEMENT BY DEFENCE COUNSEL

Senior lawyer and former president of the Singapore Law Society, Mr Francis SEOW, is defending Ms TEO and Mr SEONG. He has not yet been permitted access to them. However, he has issued a strongly worded two page statement dated 20 April. He stated that the ex-detainees "have not broken any of their conditions of their release. This is clear from the Government's own legal documents relating to the arrests". He also referred to the govt's repeated statements that the detainees had not been ill-treated and its invitations to speak out and take legal action if such was alleged. On Monday "They issued a joint statement denying the Government's claims that there had been no cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment and thus nailed the lie. On Tuesday, the Government's response was to imprison them. ... The Government's action is a monumental folly...it has seriously damaged people's trust and faith in Government. After this action, Singaporeans will become more cynical of the Government's words and gestures of good faith if they are not already."

LIKE SOUTH AFRICA

Referring to Singapore's international reputation, Mr Seow continues, "We can never hope to stand in the front ranks of civilised nations if we behave like a totalitarian state with Internal Security police arresting citizens for speaking out. We may soon find that, like South Africa, other nations may be reluctant to continue, or grant, trade or commercial privileges or invest further in Singapore if we become a political pariah."

THE REAL REASON

"The real reason behind this apparently irrational act," continues Mr Seow, "is that the Government does not trust the people... This action is a revealing example of the abuse of power by the use of the Internal Security apparatus to bolster the declining fortunes of the ruling party."

NO HELP NEEDED

Finally, Mr Seow says, "We should remember, however, that at this moment nine persons are being subjected to sophisticated interrogation techniques designed to extract probably, yet another televised confession that they were manipulated by some Marxist mastermind to concoct a story to embarrass the Government. The Singapore Government does not need help to embarrass itself."

EX-DETAINEE INTERVIEWED

Lawyer Ms TANG Fong Har, one of the ex-detainees who signed the April 18 press statement but who is in the UK with her husband having overstayed her ISD permission for visiting him, was featured on the BBC World Service radio on 22 April. She denied the govt's accusations against her and the other detainees that

they are linked to the Communist Party of Malaya saying such allegations are "complete balderdash" and she stood by the press statement she and the other 8 have made. She said she will be campaigning for the release of the detainees and for the release of Singapore's longest serving prisoner of conscience Mr CHIA Thye Poh who has served 22 years to date. Ms TANG also said the commission of inquiry would be a "mere whitewash". "You can't set up a commission of inquiry to investigate into the allegations and, at the same time, before it is set up, re-arrest everyone related to the statement except myself."

In reporting her radio interview, the STRAITS TIMES of 23 April distorted her intention with a headline: "Ex-detainee: I'll campaign for Chia Thye Poh" and put her photo alongside that of Chia. This thereby associates her with the govt's accusations against Mr CHIA that he is a member of the Communist Party of Malaya, allegations that have failed to convince any international human rights body for the past 2 decades.

MORE GOVT EXCUSES

The STRAITS TIMES of 24 April reported the Prime Minister's assertion on his return the day before from a trip to the US and Italy. "We must get down to the bottom of these allegations by the 9 persons that they had been abused and assaulted during their detentions," he said. His son Brig Gen Lee Hsien Loong on 23 April referred to Ms TANG's intention to campaign for the release of all the detainees by smearing her and Mr Chia in the same sentence: "If she wants to lobby for Chia Thye Poh, doesn't that mean she sympathises with what Chia Thye Poh believes, which is the overthrow of the Government and the establishment of a Marxist state? Isn't that what the plot is about?" It is doubtful that even the audience he was speaking to was fooled by this propaganda; he was in his constituency for a kindergarten's parents' day function.

AND MORE DIRTY TRICKS

To ensure it can bring two decades of anti-communist propaganda into play on the issue, the Home Affairs Ministry yesterday (24 April) released a statement reiterating its allegations against Chia Thye Poh. In today's STRAITS TIMES (25 April) this was played up both in a front page headline and in a subsequent article.

The mention of Chia by Ms TANG in her BBC interview has enabled the govt to imply that he is somehow connected with the present detainees most of whom were about 5 years old when he was detained. Some low journalistic tricks have been used to advance this guilt by association device. For example, today's front page article said that Mr Chia declined asylum in Canada last year because he wants to be a revolutionary martyr (and omitted the fact that since he has done no wrong he refuses to do anything that would imply he has). Also carried in the same article, after this very stale news, is the story of the open

letter from the present detainees' families to the ISD asking the whereabouts of their loved ones.

CATHOLIC MASS HELD

On Thursday evening, 21 May a Mass was held at the Church of the Risen Christ for the detainees. About 800 people attended (the STRAITS TIMES reported 400).

18 priests concelebrated the mass. The attendance was considered very good considering there had been no publicity. (After the arrests in May last year, over 2400 people attended such a service after several days publicity and before the Archbishop came down on the side of the govt.) There was no sermon as the Archbishop had banned all comment on the detentions. There was a 5 minute silence instead.

Members of the congregation noticed a stronger than usual gangster element among the ISD personnel present and are therefore expecting them to create some trouble or incident at some stage.

ARCHBISHOP'S GAME NOW OBVIOUS

Catholic Archbishop Gregory Yong was seen leaving the heavily guarded compound of the ISD-Home Affairs Ministry at Phoenix Park recently. It appears that he has moved from his former position of apparent political naivete and clerical defensiveness to one of active collaboration with ISD tactics.

Members of the detainees' families visited the Archbishop last week to invite him to the Mass. His Vicar-General, known as a primary ISD contact within the Catholic Church, was also present. Archbishop Yong told the families not to "use" the church, not to pre-judge the issue, not to "jump the gun", to leave it to the lawyers and the govt commission of inquiry. He was very emotional and tried to intimidate the families by slamming his pen on the desk, wagging his finger and shouting.

SERMON CENSORED

The Archbishop told the elderly Father Ho, whom he suspended last year and who is now priest of the Church of the Risen Christ, that he would be held responsible for anything in his homily that might be "misinterpreted" and that no laypersons were to be permitted to speak. When asked by the families if they could just explain why their loved ones signed the press statement proclaiming their innocence, the Archbishop said no.

ISD CREATE AND EXPLOIT WEAKNESS

Ex-detainee bookshop owner and publisher, Ms LIM Li-Kok, is now being used by the ISD against the other detainees. Innocent of the ways of secret police she may not understand how they use people and information. She was kept separately from the other detainees during her detention and was given special treatment towards the end of her detention by being accommodated with an officer's family within the compound. She saw herself as merely

giving the ISD the facts as she knew in relation to her own actions. She may not have been aware of how they could be used against other detainees. Most of the ex-detainees have been forced to meet with their case officers after their release. Two weeks ago at one such meeting, Ms LIM was asked whether it was true that, 11 years ago, she sent some books from her bookshop to Mr TAN Wah Piow in the UK. She said she had. This exchange is now the basis of the govt's headlines that it has new evidence on "the conspiracy" and that Ms LIM was a vital link in sending books to the Communist Party of Malaya through Mr TAN.

DENIALS FORTHCOMING

Statements have been issued by former student leaders of Singapore University in 1974-75 concerning their alleged role in the present "conspiracy". From London and Hongkong respectively Mr TAN Wah Piow and Mr TSUI Hon Kwong have told the press that the govt's accusations are sheer fantasy.

Also implicated is Malaysian Ms Cecilia LIM Soi Moi, also a former student leader with Mr TAN in Singapore 13 years ago. Since then she has not been politically active. However, last December, less than 2 months after the massive detentions in Malaysia, Ms LIM and her husband were picked up by secret police during their weekend shopping in their home town of Penang. Their 2 year-old son was forcibly taken from them in the shopping centre and she and her husband were separately interrogated throughout the weekend. At least one of the interrogators was from Singapore. The secret police tried to recruit the couple to infiltrate their peer group of university graduates and threatened them if they did not comply. The couple agreed but shortly after fled the country leaving all their belongings behind.

WHAT TO EXPECT

It can be expected that the govt will use all its power to extract retractions from the people held without trial and self-incriminating statements from those ex-detainees who are not in detention but in the wider prison of Singapore island under restrictions on their civil rights. It will probably concentrate on the narrow legalities such as "proof" of torture since it knows, having committed the torture itself, there are no independent witnesses. It will continue its massive propaganda campaign as an exercise in self-justification for the benefit of the citizenry of Singapore and foreign govts who want an excuse not to get involved. Undoubtedly, the secret police have techniques which have yet to be tried on this lot of detainees and which may "succeed" in destroying perception and personality to the point where the detainees say what they are told to. However, since there is now a widespread respect in Singapore for the re-arrested detainees and an almost total disbelief of the govt line, the Singapore Govt may be further alienating itself from the people.

MALAYSIAN CONNECTION: A MILKSHAKE IN PICCADILLY

It can also be expected that the Malaysian detainees are under renewed interrogation in order for the Malaysian and Singaporean govts to bolster each other's fragile cases by coordinating their conspiracy theories. Probably we will be treated to further "new evidence" of detainees having met each other for a milkshake in Piccadilly 12 years ago and the sinister implications of this for bringing down both govts.

US STATE DEPT CONCERNED

The US Dept of State has issued the following statement:
"We understand the Government of Singapore has promised a full inquiry into the allegations made by the detainees yesterday of mistreatment while in the hands of the authorities. We are concerned at the rearrest following their public statement of these allegations. We are also concerned about the reported detention of the attorney who participated in their defense. It is our hope that the GOS will move quickly to clarify the circumstances of their new detention and make available the results of the investigation into their charges." April 22, 1988.

NZ PARLIAMENTARY PROTEST

One third of the members of the NZ Parliament (34 MPs) have signed a letter to Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew expressing their extreme concern at the re-arrest of the 8 ex-detainees. "In addition," they say, "the arrest and detention of Patrick Seong, Council Member of the Law Society of Singapore, without any charge being laid against him, is a further blow against the rule of law."

"The detention of citizens for extensive periods without trial is fundamentally alien to our constitutional and legal system in New Zealand. ... The truth or otherwise of any allegations against these detainees should surely be left for a court to decide. ... We urge you to either release the detainees immediately and unconditionally or bring them to trial in open court. We seek your commitment to restore the democratic reputation of your country." April 21, 1988

#####

Pre-April 18 Update

As promised in the previous Update, we include here material which was ready for publication when the detainees issued their press statement on April 18 and were then arrested.

VINCENT CHENG UNDER INTENSE PRESSURE

For the past few weeks, even before the recent April 19 arrests, Vincent Cheng has been under renewed pressure. He was asked to write more statements incriminating others especially clergy. (He was asked to go over his previous statements again and also to write new statements about all the 100 or so Catholic priests

in Singapore, their family and educational background. His case officer, S K Tan, had threatened to withdraw his privileges - TV & video viewing, playing his musical instrument - if he did not cooperate. However, he had, until recently refused to write anything. He had been told that his release would be decided at "the very top" (ie PM Lee Kuan Yew) and that it would be unlikely while the PM's case against the FAR EASTERN ECONOMIC REVIEW was still pending. In recent weeks his family noticed that he was again strained and tense.

It is also reported that Dr Ee Peng Liang, a Catholic layperson who is a prominent member of the ruling party, had been asked to help find Vincent Cheng a job in the church when he is released. Vincent has also been told repeatedly that he should not talk to the press when he is released. However, with the new arrests that date has been delayed considerably.

MS TEO TALKS TO BBC & ASIAWEEK

Before her rearrest last week, Ms Teo spoke to the BBC on 18 February. She said she was interrogated in a very cold room and the interrogating officers hit her on the face while shouting continually. She was told to speak if she did not want to be beaten up and she was not allowed to sleep for two and a half days. Explaining why she broke her silence, she told ASIAWEEK: "It's time the truth came out. The govt has always had its side of the story published and I have just kept quiet."

"CHATS" WITH THE SPOOKS

Most of the ex-detainees were "invited" from time to time to chats with their ISD case officers. Over the weeks immediately preceding the recent re-arrests, most of them were called once or even twice. They were told that the ISD knew they were keeping in touch with each other and warned them against "being made use of" by other ex-detainees. Some of the interviews were cordial and brief while others were more direct. Questions asked included: Who amongst the detainees did they meet and why? Who initiated the meetings? Were they still angry and bitter over their arrests? Have they been "naughty"? Some of them were asked whether lawyers Francis Seow, Teo Soh Lunn (now detained) and Patrick Seong (now detained) had been trying to get them to talk to the foreign press about their detentions. Ms TEO herself was asked about the interview she gave to the BBC and whether she would "stop" if the govt stopped "harping on the Marxist plot". Ms Teo was last interviewed by the ISD over lunch on the Saturday before her Tuesday re-arrest. At this meeting she was given a warning about speaking out and it was implied again that the govt was out to get Patrick Seong, presumably for being such an effective and fearless defence lawyer.

ARCHBISHOP "DE-ACTIVATES" JUSTICE AND PEACE

The remaining members of the Catholic Justice and Peace Commission asked for a meeting with Archbishop Gregory Yong on March 2. He informed them about the "deactivation" of the Commission and that they had "ceased to be members". He gave 3

reasons: the commission was still under surveillance; the govt wanted the commission to be registered as a society; the social doctrine of the church can be disseminated through other social groups.

TO THE AMBASSADOR

On 24 Feb 1988, 28 Members of the US Congress wrote to Singapore Ambassador Tommy Koh expressing their "continued concern about the imprisonment without trial of Vincent Cheng... Unfortunately, the release of nearly all the detainees does not diminish the injustice perpetrated against Mr Cheng... We continue to be concerned by your govt's failure to provide him basic procedural rights guaranteed in international law. Moreover, we note that a number of well-respected international human rights organisations have publicly stated that Mr Cheng is unfairly imprisoned for the peaceful expression of his views. To our knowledge, nothing your govt has produced over the past eight months has altered these conclusions."

The letter also expresses concern about the restriction orders placed on 20 ex-detainees which "constitute punishment without trial" and "appear to be susceptible to arbitrary application and are not effectively subject to judicial review".

SINGAPORE'S UNFREE PRESS

Also on Feb 24, Congress member John Edward Porter spoke at length in the House about the restrictions imposed on the FAR EASTERN ECONOMIC REVIEW and other international publications and the resulting action of the Singapore Govt to allow photocopying of publications it has restricted. This action, he said, "is also probably a violation of the recently agreed to US-Singapore copyright agreement". He said of the restriction "by any other name it is a ban" and continued, "A country's stability and confidence are created by allowing information to flow freely, not by restricting journals whose views are at odds with the govt's. Such restrictions display an insecurity which is unbecoming of a strong democracy and ally of the United States." The Congressional Record entitles the speech "Singapore's Unfree Press". (Vol. 134, No. 18)

LETTER TO SCHULTZ

On March 14, 23 Congress members wrote to Secretary of State George Schultz "expressing our alarm about the restrictions on the foreign press imposed by the Government of Singapore and, in particular, about an amendment to Singapore's Newspapers and Printing Presses Act." They noted that the measure was actionable under the Trade Act and was inconsistent with the US-Singapore copyright agreement. They urged Secretary Schultz to "seek appropriate remedies".

CHURCH ORGANISATION ISSUES OPEN LETTER

The Christian Conference of Asia, the international ecumenical organisation expelled from Singapore on Dec 30, 1987, has issued an open letter 2 weeks ago to its member churches and "friends".

The 7-page letter states, "The accusations listed by the [Singapore] government show little understanding of the way the church perceives its role in society and throws into question the reality of religious freedom in Singapore itself." The CCA says it is providing detailed information on the accusations for the benefit of member churches and councils "not because we have an obligation to answer the Singapore government". The statement then rebuts 5 main accusations by the Singapore government. It concludes, "The government is not the ultimate source of wisdom and power. This means that whenever there is conflict between church and state, Christians are required to obey God rather than human institutions... In matters of faith, therefore, the CCA is answerable to God and not the Singapore, or any other, government." The organisation has decided to decentralise its offices to 4 places: Tokyo, Hongkong, Manila and Chiangmai.

The Indonesian Council of Churches has withdrawn its initial apparent agreement with the Singapore Govt's expulsion of CCA and now says it regrets the action. It claims it was misquoted.

CHENG ADOPTED

Amnesty International branches in Canada and Hongkong have adopted Vincent Cheng as a prisoner of conscience and will work for his release.

EXPLANATION SOUGHT

Malaysian economics professor, Dr Jomo K.S., wrote to the Singapore Home Affairs minister on 5 February seeking an explanation for the ban placed on his entry to Singapore. Since he was abroad when the arrests of the Singapore detainees were made last May-June, he questioned the grounds for the ban which were stated to be related to actions in support of the detainees. Dr Jomo is now a visiting professor at Cambridge University, UK.

MEDIA COMMENT

The Jan 4 Opinion column of the CHRISTIAN SCIENCE MONITOR (US) carries the title "Singapore's capitalism doesn't spell democracy - The creative people want more than cash, they want liberty". Written by New York journalist Lucy Komisar, the article says, "This country is increasingly undemocratic and repressive. Some say that Lee Kuan Yew, who has been prime minister for 28 years, uses a Leninist party with a capitalist program to run a Mandarin dynasty. The press is controlled and public meetings can't be held without official permission."

The ASIAN WALL STREET JOURNAL also on January 4 printed an article by John Berthelson on the FAR EASTERN ECONOMIC REVIEW's pull out from Singapore. After giving details of the issue he quoted an international banker in Singapore who "said that businessmen in the country have lost their last readily available source of business and financial news. Businessmen made the same point in a recent US Embassy survey of American investment in Singapore. They cited the restricted flow of information as a matter of concern about doing business in the country."

A MELBOURNE HERALD article by Trevor Fishlock was reprinted on March 10 in THE STAR (Christchurch, NZ) headed "Nation caught in the Mandarin's Grip". A slightly satirical article it notes the extreme forms of social control in Singapore which is "puritan, strict, diligent, meritocratic, elitist, interventionist, a nanny state, a headmaster state, business-minded..." He continues "Mr Lee built this remarkable city and made himself the sort of autocratic leader, half-statesman, half-brigand, that has featured in Chinese history for centuries."

The same article, this time taken from the DAILY TELEGRAPH (UK), appeared in THE DOMINION (Wellington, NZ) on April 11 entitled "Cunning old warlord may yet battle on".

EMERGENCY COMMITTEE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS IN SINGAPORE
P O BOX 28-100, CHRISTCHURCH, AOTEAROA-NEW ZEALAND