



Emergency committee for human rights
in Singapore

UPDATE 28
SINGAPORE HUMAN RIGHTS ALERT

MARCH 1990

INTERNATIONAL ACTIONS

WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES SENDS TELEGRAM

On 5 Sept 1989 the President of the World Council of Churches, the Rev Lois M Wilson, sent the following telegram to Prime Minister LEE Kuan Yew:

URGENTLY REQUEST IMMEDIATE AND UNCONDITIONAL RELEASE OF VINCENT CHENG. REV LOIS M WILSON, PRESIDENT, WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES

This telegram was among thousands of messages sent to the Prime Minister prior to the hearings of Mr Cheng and Ms Teo as a result of their cases being highlighted in AI's August and November international newsletters. Vancouver Justice and Peace Centre also sent a telegram.

CANADIAN GOVT WELCOMES "RELEASE"

In a recent letter to the Canadian Section of Amnesty International, foreign minister Joe Clark welcomed the release into exile of Chia and continued "I agree that our joy in the release of Mr Chia does not mean we should overlook the fate of other prisoners of conscience". The Canadian government has kept up the pressure on Singapore at various levels over the detentions.

CANADIAN AMNESTY NAMES NEW OFFICE AFTER CHIA

Amnesty International opened its new Winnipeg office this year and named it in honour of Mr Chia Thye Poh. Also, in a recent speech on Social Justice and the International Community, Canada's former UN ambassador, Stephen Lewis, spoke about Chia and read out his letter of thanks sent to AI Canada.

CANADIAN CHURCHES MOBILISE

Several Canadian churches sent Christmas cards to Vincent Cheng last Christmas.

Sponsors: • Jim Anderton M.P. • Jocelyn Armstrong • Katie Boanas • Prof J Burrows • Very Rev Dr Alan Brash • Jan Cormack • 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 Whakahuihui Vercoe •

NEW UPDATE SERVICE

Amnesty International in Canada is now publishing a high quality UPDATE of human rights in Singapore, Malaysia and Brunei. For more information contact: Amnesty International, 322.5 Bloor St W, Toronto, Ontario M5S 1W5.

SINGAPORE VOICE IN VANCOUVER

Singaporean George Khng spoke in Vancouver on 30 October 1989 at the invitation of AI. He outlined the history of human rights abuse and suppression of democratic freedoms in Singapore. He spoke in support of detainees Vincent Cheng and Teo Soh Lung. Mr Khng has migrated to Canada since he spoke on Human Rights Day in Singapore in 1988.

ASIA WATCH PUBLISHES

In September 1989, the influential US-based human rights organisation, Asia Watch, published the 112-page SILENCING ALL CRITICS: Human Rights Violations in Singapore. The book details the continuing abuse of human rights under the headings of The Internal Security Act, Government Hostility Towards Non-Governmental Organizations, The Press and Broadcast Media and, finally, Politically Motivated Attacks Against Opposition Politicians.

The book is an accurate and valuable summary of recent events giving both historical background and several useful appendices of relevant documents. The book is available from Asia Watch, 485 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10017, USA for US\$8.00.

A cheaper reprint containing additional appendices may soon be available from a Malaysian organisation.

US LAWYERS VISIT SINGAPORE

A delegation from the New York City Bar Association visited Singapore in July 1989. Deputy Director Kenneth Roth of Human Rights Watch (umbrella body for Asia Watch) accompanied the delegation which met with government officials.

INTERNATIONAL BAR ASSOCIATION TAKES ACTION

On 16 Jan 1989 the IBA President wrote to the Singapore Minister of Home Affairs about the release and immediate rearrest of the detainees after their habeas corpus applications were granted on technical grounds. President Wm Reece Smith expressed concern about "the Singapore Government's commitment to uphold the rule

of law" and appealed for the release of the detainees. His letter and the Minister's dismissive reply were reprinted in the International Bar News last year. Also reprinted was an edited version of Mr Anthony Lester QC's article in The Independent (see Update 27) entitled "Banned from the Courts of Singapore".

PERSECUTION OF LAWYERS DOCUMENTED

The International Commission of Jurists (Geneva) has published a report entitled "The Harassment and Persecution of Judges and Lawyers January 1988 - June 1989". Singapore figures prominently for its persecution of Mr Anthony Lester QC (banned from Singapore), Mr J B Jeyaretnam (disbarred, fined, imprisoned, expelled from parliament, cleared by the Privy Council but not pardoned by the Singapore Govt), Ms Teo Soh Lung (detained without trial), Mr Patrick Seong (defence lawyer for Ms Teo who was himself detained without trial and interrogated for a month) and Mr Francis Seow (former solicitor-general and president of the Law Society who was also imprisoned without trial for 72 days, harshly interrogated, slapped with politically motivated tax charges on his release, tried in absentia and removed from his parliamentary seat). The report was edited by Reed Brody of the ICJ's Centre for the Independence of Judges and Lawyers.

SUBMISSIONS MADE TO UNITED NATIONS

In Geneva on 28 August 1989, ex-detainee and political exile Ms TANG Fong Har addressed the 41st Session of the United Nations Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities. Speaking on behalf of PAX ROMANA, the international movement of Catholic intellectuals and students, Ms TANG spoke of her detention in 1987 and of the repressive apparatus of executive detention in Singapore designed to "stifle political dissent for years and even decades". As a lawyer, she was able point out the implications of the lack of judicial review. She urged the Sub-Commission to ensure that the detainees be released, that all restrictions be lifted on ex-detainees, that harassment of their families and friends cease and that there be an international inquiry to assess the human rights situation in Singapore.

In its submission AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL said "Administrative detention [in Singapore] is too often used...to intimidate and silence opponents of the government... AI welcomes the release of Chia Thye Poh but calls for the lifting of restrictions".

The INTERNATIONAL COMMISSION OF JURISTS also made submissions referring to the UN Body of Principles for the Protection of All Persons under Any Form of Detention or Imprisonment.

OPPOSITION LEADER ADDRESSES LONDON FORUM

In a wide-ranging address at the London School of Economics on 14 October 1989, exiled opposition leader Mr Francis Seow gave a careful analysis of the history of the Lee Kuan Yew government in Singapore. As a senior lawyer, former solicitor-general and president of the Law Society, Mr Seow was well able to achieve his stated aim of giving "some insights into the exercise of awesome power by a majority government, which, in order to ensure its political longevity, pays scant regard to universally accepted constitutional norms and enacts laws enabling it to deprive, at will, its citizens of their birthright and, under the guise of law and order, to remove or restrict their essential freedoms."

EDINBURGH FESTIVAL FEATURES SINGAPORE PLAYS

During August 1989, the Traverse Theatre put on a series of plays banned in their own countries under the title CENSORED as part of the Festival Fringe activities. A play by Singapore's Third Stage drama group, "Oh Singapore!" was performed. Leading members of Third Stage were arrested in 1987 and 1988. In a preview of the series in Scotland Sunday 13 Aug, a member of the International Committee for Artists' Freedom commented: "There's no political ideology in Oh Singapore! It's like a student revue. Astonishing that it should be banned." The subsequent review in The Scotsman on 23 August stated, "The eloquence of Oh Singapore!... lies not in the play itself but that the Singaporean authorities should find inoffensive material worthy of banning... As a play it is insubstantial, as satire tremulously weak. Yet it was still enough to have members of Third Stage arrested and detained."

JAPANESE SUPPORT GROUP TRANSLATES REPORT

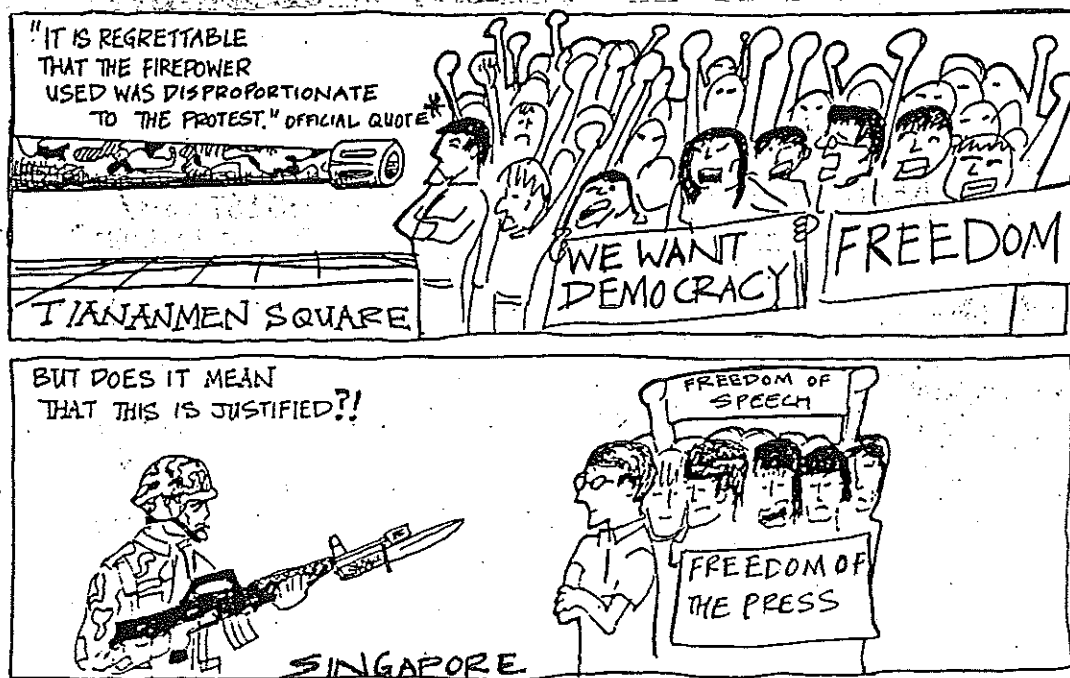
The Kansai Emergency Committee for Human Rights in Singapore (KECHRIS) (Kansai includes Kyoto, Osaka and Kobe metropolitan areas) has translated into Japanese the report on Mr Vincent Cheng's habeas corpus hearing. The report was written by international observers Ms Carolyn Risk and Rev Dr James Stuart. The translated report has been sent to several hundred Japanese supporters of the Singapore campaign.

The Committee has rostered its members to send a protest card to the Singapore government every day. It has been doing this since February 1988. Japanese lawyers are also being approached to take a professional interest in Singapore's repressive legislation.

HONGKONG KEEPS UP THE PRESSURE

Amnesty International in Hongkong last year put a hooded person in a cage for a day in the centre of the crowded business district. A large display with photos and background statements identified the prisoner as Vincent Cheng. Amnesty members took turns at sitting in the cell in the hot sun.

The AI branch also publicly appealed for hundreds of Christmas cards to be sent to Vincent and Soh Lung (Hongkong Standard 7 Dec 89). A tree planting day to remember prisoners of conscience is planned for March 1990.



* BY LEE KUAN YEW

CARTOON FROM SINGAPORE HUMAN RIGHTS PAMPHLET

Guest Traveller's Tales

The controlled press around the world has a tendency to mix the sublime with the ridiculous. Perhaps it comes from the coarsening of judgment that results from having constantly to write propaganda news stories of dubious veracity. Singapore's *Straits Times* is no exception.

On 23 June, for example, the paper led with "China Executes Seven More Protesters," but jostling for prominence was the second lead, under the heading "Fine for those who do not flush public toilet from next month" — a story about the latest plank in the government's campaign to punish those of its population who have not been properly housetrained. Those who ignore the new law do so on peril of a fine of up to S\$1,000 (US\$510).

And how is this law being enforced? A crack battalion of inspectors from Singapore's Ministry of Environment will be roving public toilets in pursuit of the aberrant non-flushers. This could prove embarrassing for the respectable patrons of such public facilities. How to distinguish the man from the ministry from the common-or-garden Peeping Tom?

The lifts in many of the republic's high-rise public housing estates are already equipped with sensors and cameras to detect those users without the patience or self-control to wait until they get home before relieving themselves. The alarms go off, the doors automatically lock and the offender has his mess for company while he waits for the inspector to arrive.

A friend suggested that an offender of a more nervous disposition might involuntarily unburden himself further when the alarms go off, but we will have to wait for the next front page story in the *Straits Times* for confirmation. This is not to make light of the nuisance caused by people who treat public spaces as toilets. But this seems to be a problem better tackled through education than through armies of busybody snoopers backed by the courts.

It is a fact that Asians of various nationalities have problems using seat toilets favoured in the West and it is common to find shoe marks on the seats of toilets, evidence of Asians trying to use them as they would squat toilets. Only in Japan, with its national efficiency and a candid attitude to bodily functions, have I seen detailed, illustrated instructions on the proper use of seat toilets. That is why Japanese toilets are cleaner than those of Singapore, and there are no reproachful spec-

tors intruding on one of life's more personal functions.

Below is the public service sign that warns people in Singapore not to urinate in public. It cannot be criticised for failing to convey its message, though some have sug-



gested that not only is it sexist, but the trajectory would require either an exceptional natural prowess or a teeth-clenching determination.

One place the ministry's inspectors may have to refrain from visiting is Bugis Street, famous for its transvestites and open-air food stalls before it was demolished in 1985. But since decadent Western tourists kept asking for Bugis Street, the government has now recreated it across the road from where the original stood, at a cost of S\$12 million.

According to a Singapore Tourist Promotion Board spokeswoman, "The new Bugis Street will be virtually a replica of the old one, right down to the toilet building which was used as an impromptu stage by some boisterous clients." And she added: "The new Bugis street will look, smell and be very much like the old." I do not know about the rest but it certainly will not smell like the old if officious toilet inspectors start throwing their weight around.

The women of Singapore do not seem all that interested in marriage, as the officially sponsored mating and breeding campaigns prove. What is more they do not seem all that interested in sex either. According to Prof. Kok Lee Peng of the National University of Singapore, who specialises in sexual impotence, many of the "upright Confucian Gentlemen" of Singapore seem to have a dormant libido. But luckily for these gentlemen, whose uprightness is more a matter of supposed moral rectitude than sexual vigour, Singapore women do not seem to mind.

Prof. Kok, perhaps not the most fortunate of names for such a speciality, is quoted as saying, "Women here are quite happy

not to be disturbed." No wonder Singapore's population growth is stagnating. Another observation by Kok should give pause to those who think that Singaporean planners are trying too hard to increase the nation's falling birth rate. Kok says that many of her detumescent patients can "function" sexually when they go on trips to Thailand and Taiwan but cannot do so with their wives in Singapore.

Perhaps the sterility of Singapore, with its legions of thought police and toilet inspectors, affects even the sex drive. If so, the moral of the story is that less supervision and more freedom all round, including in politics and sex, could reverse the declining population trends of Singapore. Otherwise the men will continue to fly to other countries for pleasure, leaving their wives in undisturbed contentment at home.

If, according to the advertising copywriters, the Singapore girl is a great way to fly, it does not follow that her English is going to be equally impeccable. The national airline is concerned about its stewardesses speaking "Singlish," and has engaged the British Council to improve the language standards of its cabin crews. Among the Singlish bloopers quoted in an article on the topic are a stewardess who announced, "We will now be serving snakes [snacks]" and another who asked a first class passenger after serving him with Swedish meatballs, "Sir, Would you like some sauce on your balls?"

The Singapore press is not without humour, though mostly it is unintentional; the subtler variety tends to come in the letters column.

One reader, Peter Gault from Brunei, fed up with the self-righteousness of Singapore's morality propaganda, was moved to offer his thoughts. "I am intrigued by the mention of two places. One is called Asia. In it everything is chaste, moral, spiritually unconcerned with material things, deeply devoted to aged parents and their traditions. The other is called the West. In it life is a non-stop orgy of loutish self-indulgent greed, unredeemed by either tradition or concern for others."

Although he had lived in or visited 23 countries in Europe and Asia in the past 18 years, he had not come across these two places called "Asia" and the "West." He asked readers to help him buy an airline ticket to these places, as "it is always interesting to visit countries which are utterly unlike anything one has come across." ■