

## SINGAPORE HUMAN RIGHTS ALERT

Tan Wah Piow Refutes Govt Allegations. Detainees Unrepresented.

## INTERNATIONAL DISBELIEF

Disbelief has been the international reaction to the Singapore Government's allegations that the 16 detained community leaders were involved in a communist plot to overthrow it. There has also been an outcry against the unjust Internal Security Act which enables the government to imprison anybody it wishes without trial.

## TAN WAH PIOW CHALLENGES SINGAPORE GOVERNMENT

The allegations all tie up to the supposed "mastermind" of the plot, Mr Tan Wah Piow, who is now reading law at Balliol College, Oxford, UK. On 28 May he replied to the government's smear campaign with a full statement to the press. (The 5 page document is available on request.)

He said:

"First and foremost, I wish to categorically deny having any ideological or organisational links, let alone being the mastermind of any alleged attempt to set up a communist state in Singapore. If ever there were any attempt by any group to set up such a communist state, I shall be the first to oppose...

My primary political concern is how best we, as Singaporeans, can strengthen the guarantee of civil liberties which are espoused in the Singapore Constitution... I have ideologically embraced the notion of the rule of law and constitutionalism as the primary basis of protecting the rights of individuals.

The Singapore Government is well aware that I intend to propagate these legitimate jurisprudential views and the government is also fully aware that I am one who is capable of putting the most complex of social ideals into language which the layman can understand. Combining these ideas with my skill, they become a lethal threat to the Singapore government which opts to rule by abuse of law than rule according to law...

I am as close to Marxism as the Singapore government is to justice and democracy."

## PARALLEL WITH BENIGNO AQUINO AND KIM DAE JUNG

Interpreting the recent events in Singapore, observers have noted a similarity with the Philippines and Korea. Both President Marcos and President Chun resisted the return of exiled opposition leaders Benigno Aquino and Kim Dae Jung to their respective countries. Aquino returned to his death at the hands of Marcos' military at Manila Airport. Kim was able to return

safely but remains without political rights and often under house arrest. Their political persecution derived from their successful appeal as democratic politicians.

In a similar way, the Singapore government knows the political appeal of an articulate democrat like Tan Wah Piow to the public. His defence of himself at a political show trial in 1974 already has made him something of a folk hero. He has consistently made clear his intention of returning to Singapore as soon as he can.

#### DEPRIVED OF CITIZENSHIP

On 29 May, Tan received a registered letter from the Government of Singapore dated 21 May (the date of the detentions). It informed him that his citizenship was being revoked in accordance with Article 135(1) of the Singapore Constitution. Under this article (hastily inserted in 1985 when Tan's return looked imminent) a person who is away from Singapore for a continuous period of ten years is liable to have his/her citizenship revoked.

#### FILE TAKEN BY ISD

Ms Teo Soh Lung, the lawyer who was detained, had been acting for Mr Tan in the matter of citizenship as the government had refused to permit Mr Tan to register his son as a Singapore citizen at the Singapore High Commission in London. When Ms Teo was detained at 5 a.m. on 21 May, she was taken first to her office to uplift the file of Mr Tan. This file is now in the hands of the Internal Security Department. However, the government did not wait for any investigation before exercising its discretionary power to deprive Mr Tan of his citizenship. This act of making a person stateless is against international law.

#### CRUEL CONNECTION

The connecting of the 16 detainees with Mr Tan is indeed a cruel one. The responsibility for their destiny has been heaped on his head. Also it is clear that the allegations of conspiracy and of communism are incredible and unproven. Mr Tan has been an intellectual inspiration for many people but he has never had a political organisation or party.

#### THE CHURCH IS NEXT

The reality is less sensational. Having destroyed the union movement and the Chinese-language parties and institutions during the 60's and 70's, the government has faced the new importance of the English-language institutions, the most organised of which is the church. In the sterile political landscape of Singapore,

even those who are slightly different stand out like high mountains. Socially committed young people who expressed their commitment through their faith thus came to the attention of the huge intelligence network in Singapore which, in fact, now has very little to do. With its customary arrogance the government decided to threaten the Church and also express its bitterness

towards Tan by connecting him with the "plot".

Since the arrests, the Church has received warnings from the Prime Minister through his agents that he did not arrest the community leaders because they were church workers, but if the church makes too much noise he will also take on the church.

#### PASTORAL LETTER

On Sunday 31 May, a pastoral letter and statement (Update 2) were read out at all Catholic Churches in Singapore. The main part was the joint statement reported previously. The pastoral letter took the form of a short introduction and conclusion to the joint statement. The Archbishop, Gregory Yong, has asked for prayers for the detainees and their families. This will take the form of offering Masses for them, praying for them during Masses and encouraging people to pray daily for the detainees and their families.

#### CHRISTIAN STUDENTS THREATENED

The young members of the Student Christian Movement are being harrassed by security officials and pressured to give information under threat of a "second sweep" of arrests.

#### WORKERS' PARTY LEADER ARRESTED

On 30 May, Mr J B Jeyaretnam, secretary general of the Workers' Party and until his expulsion in January one of the two opposition members of parliament, was arrested for demonstrating against the detentions outside the presidential palace. He has been released on bail. The government waited until it was able to expel him from parliament (where he raised many questions) before it acted to detain the 16 community leaders. Special legislation was passed to enable his expulsion. Mr Jeyaretnam is a lawyer and an Anglican layman.

#### DIVERSION FROM CORRUPTION PROBE

It is interesting to note that the detentions occurred the day before the date of the inquiry report into the death of cabinet minister Teh Cheang Wan. Teh committed suicide last year as a result of investigations by the police into his activities as minister in charge of the Housing Development Board. This is a considerable embarrassment for the Prime Minister who always held

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him up as an example of leadership despite widespread rumours of corruption among the general populace.

#### DETAINEES UNREPRESENTED

To date it appears that not all detainees have lawyers. This is important in order to ensure access to them on a regular basis. Those who do not have lawyers yet include Vincent Cheng, Kenneth Tsang, Tay Hong Seng, Low Yit Leng, Tan Tee Seng, Jenny Chin. Legal representation for Chia Boon Tai and Chung Lai Mei has been offered but has yet to be confirmed.

#### BAD TREATMENT

Further reports of bad treatment are coming in. Kevin De Souza has apparently been badly treated. Vincent Cheng is reported to

be drawn, haggard and looking unwell. Ms Ng Bee Leng was sent to hospital on the second day of her arrest.

#### MEDIA REPORTS

The Singapore STRAITS TIMES continues to print the propaganda put out by the government. On Friday 29 May the headline was "How I Used the Church" and gave a purported confession by Vincent Cheng. It is expected that this propaganda will continue for some days.

It is reported that ASIaweek, under pressure from its Singapore office, will not now give such extensive coverage to the detentions.

#### INTERNATIONAL ACTIONS

The Human Rights Committee of the National Council of Churches in Korea has sent messages of protest to the Singapore government and of support to the Catholic Church. Similar actions have been taken by councils and churches in many Asian countries including Australia and New Zealand.

Japanese Supreme Court judge, Mr Nakadaira (member of the Asian Human Rights Commission) and the Japan Civil Liberties Union have delivered a petition to the Singapore Embassy in Tokyo. The Minister of Home Affairs, Mr Jayakumar, was in Tokyo at the time.

Fourteen Malaysian organisations ranging from trade unions and civil rights groups to religious and academic bodies have formed the "Human Rights Support Group for the Singapore 16".

In Hongkong, students organisations and church groups have given a protest to the Singapore High Commission.

Catholic organisations in the USA have met with Singapore's Ambassador to the United Nations.

The International Commission of Jurists, in Geneva and Amnesty International in London have taken up the case. Other human rights groups are approaching the member states of the EEC. The International Federation of Human Rights and the World Council of Churches are also taking action.

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