



Emergency committee for human rights
in Singapore

UPDATE NO. 5

8 JUNE 1987

SINGAPORE HUMAN RIGHTS ALERT

Government Forces "Confessions" To Be Shown on TV Soon.

Local & International Calls for Democracy & Justice.

"CONFESSIONS" VIDEOTAPED

Videotaping of "confessions" by many detainees is reportedly almost completed and they are expected to be screened on national TV in the near future. Editing of the tapes to produce the most damaging confessions and also the long-term political strategy of the government will no doubt determine the exact timing.

Ms NG Bee Leng is finished with her videotaping. Mr Vincent Cheng was seen being driven away from the ISD prison presumably to the Singapore Broadcasting Corporation studios. Ms TEO Soh Lung has resisted videotaping to date and has sent word through her lawyer asking friends whether she should do it or not.

NEWSFLASH NEWSFLASH NEWSFLASH NEWSFLASH NEWSFLASH NEWSFLASH

AS THIS UPDATE GOES TO PRESS WE HAVE HEARD THAT VINCENT CHENG WILL MAKE A PUBLIC CONFESSION ON TV TOMORROW NIGHT TUESDAY 9 JUNE AT 9.30 PM. TO MAKE IT MORE "CONVINCING" TO THE PUBLIC, WE ARE TOLD THAT MR CHENG WILL BE INTERVIEWED BY REPORTERS ALONG WITH CHARTS OF THE "MARXIST NETWORK" WHICH WILL BE POINTED TO BY MR CHENG WHILE EXPLAINING HIS ROLE. THE GOVT MUST KNOW THAT A DETAINEE READING A "CONFESSION" FROM A PREPARED STATEMENT NO LONGER IMPRESSES THE PUBLIC.

NEWSFLASH NEWSFLASH NEWSFLASH NEWSFLASH NEWSFLASH NEWSFLASH

NO LEGAL VALUE

Such forced confessions are routine in Singapore for people detained without trial under the Internal Security Act. The Act is used precisely because the government has insufficient evidence to get a conviction in an open court. Thus the detainees are forced to confess and to implicate others as the price for their own release. The government will then point to the confessions as proof of the charges it originally made against the detainees. However, making a confession is also no guarantee of release.

These confessions have been universally condemned in the past by respected international human rights organisations including Amnesty International as having no legal standing and no validity.

STRATEGY MAY NOT WORK

There is also a strong possibility that this government formula for repression may not work this time. The general public, while afraid of the government, no longer believe its propaganda. They know, quite simply, that once again Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew is crushing anyone who opposes him and who begins to acquire a popular base in the community.

INTERROGATIONS CONTINUE

It appears that some detainees are no longer under intensive interrogation. However, there is considerable concern for others. Mr TAN Tee Seng has written a note to his family (picked up from the Internal Security Department by his sister about June 3) saying not to engage a lawyer as it would complicate things. The urgent tone of the request almost certainly means it was written under duress. Mr Tan's wife, Ms LOW Yit Leng also has no lawyer. However, Mr Vincent Cheng is now represented.

FAMILIES HOBbled BY HOPE

Government officials are dangling in front of the families the hope of possible release if they do not make too much noise about the detention of their loved ones. A detention order must be issued within one month of the detentions and the families are hoping that some will be released without a detention order being served.

While it is possible that some may be released, this hope also prevents strong solidarity action by the families and friends. It prevents increased pressure on the government from within Singapore and thus enables the authorities to proceed with their plans unchallenged.

RELEASE NO SOLUTION

However, some sources in Singapore think that a partial release is no solution. The oppressive Internal Security Act and the lack of democratic process needs, in their view, to be the focus of continuing challenges by concerned groups inside Singapore and abroad. Even those who are released will be shunned and have their reputations ruined. A persistent attempt to prevent the Singapore government using such methods again is the right course of action, they say.

ARCHBISHOP CONTINUES BETRAYAL OF HIS PEOPLE

On June 4 Catholic Archbishop Gregory Yong accepted the resignations of four priests: Fathers Joseph Ho (Chairman of the Justice and Peace Commission), Patrick Goh national chaplain of the Young Christian Workers' Movement and member of the Justice and Peace Commission), Edgar D'Souza (associate editor of THE

CATHOLIC NEWS and press liaison officer of the Archdiocese of Singapore) and Guillaume Arotcarena (director of the Catholic Centre for Foreign Workers). The Archbishop stated they resigned because they wished "to avoid a conflict or collision between the Church and State". The priests themselves issued no statement.

Further the Archbishop banned the June 14 issue of THE CATHOLIC NEWS which was ready for distribution and closed down with immediate effect the Catholic Centre for Foreign Workers.

FORCED TO RESIGN

The 4 priests were forced to resign. They were given an ultimatum to either resign or be branded Marxist and be arrested. Others would be arrested along with them. The Archbishop also informed them that he would not support them at all if they were arrested. It seems he has caved in to the Prime Minister's threat that if the Archbishop cannot control his own church then the government will do it for him.

NO POLITICS

While himself acting on the basis of pressure from secular politicians, the Archbishop has banned all his clergy from "mixing religion and politics" in their sermons. On June 5 he further suspended the 4 priests, a measure which prevents them from preaching at all. He also prohibited them from having anything to do with their former organisations.

EVEN PRAYERS FORBIDDEN

The Archbishop has also forbidden the saying of public prayers for the detainees and their families. It is reported that the Archbishop is very relieved that the detentions now, in his view, have nothing to do with the Church. The families have written to the Pope telling him of the sequence of events and of their disappointment that their Archbishop has surrendered his pastoral responsibility to the government.

ASIAN BISHOPS MEET

The Catholic bishops from the Asian region will meet on June 14. It is expected that they will consider the Singapore situation. Catholic leaders in Malaysia are known to be highly critical of Archbishop Yong's actions.

EVERYTHING IS CRUSHED

It is reported that many Catholics and community leaders are shocked at how every organisation which was concerned with the welfare of the poor and of workers has been crushed after years of faithful work. They also note how this action accords with the government's concern with its sharp drop in popularity at the last General Election and its interest in ensuring that there is no effective critical coalition of community groups at the time of the next election in 1988 or 1989.

GOVT STRATEGY CLEAR

The fact that PM Lee Kuan Yew had to come to the forefront at the June 2 press conference with Archbishop Yong shows how worried about church support the government was.

The May 27 Mass for the detainees which drew a congregation of more than 2,000 people and the Joint Statement by the Archbishop and his clergy raised the possibility that the faithful Christian service of 10 of the 16 detainees was producing widespread sympathy for them at home and abroad. There was also increasing disbelief of the government's "evidence".

So the government acted to cut the detainees off from the church. Once cut off, organised support from Christians would be difficult. During the weekend May 30/31 the Prime Minister used government supporter and Catholic layman Dr Ee Peng Liang to contact the Archbishop and arrange a meeting of pro-government Catholics with the PM. On Monday the Archbishop met with his Senate and nominated 18 people to the delegation. However, 3 (probably the now-suspended priests) were excluded by Mr Ee "because they obviously had a vested interest in the outcome of the meeting". A further six were excluded by the Internal Security Department. Thus the delegation to meet PM Lee was much reduced.

At the meeting the Prime Minister handed the Archbishop the knife to cut off the detainees from the church. At the press conference the Archbishop used it by saying he accepted the government's evidence.

INTERNATIONAL ACTION

The Malaysian "Human Rights Support Group for the Singapore 16" now has 18 member organisations.

Solidarity actions are being taken by Catholic and human rights groups in Europe, Hongkong, Australasia and North America. These will be reported in more detail in the next update.

To date no action has been reported by other churches in Singapore or by the ecumenical Asian council, the Christian Conference of Asia, which is based in Singapore and has close associations with several of the detainees.

SUGGESTED SUPPORT

It is requested that concerned groups continue strong pressure on Singapore Embassies and the government. Also follow-up of the foreign ministries of your governments on the detentions is necessary.

Further mobilisation of church and human rights organisations is also a priority along with lawyers and professional legal bodies. This issue does not finish with the release of some or all of the detainees. The Internal Security Act must never be used again.

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