



Emergency committee for human rights
in Singapore _____

UPDATE NO.8
SINGAPORE HUMAN RIGHTS ALERT

2 JULY 1987

TV Documentary "Confessions". Water Torture. Security Police
Harrass Defence Lawyers. International Mission of Jurists Visits
Singapore July 5-10. Amnesty International Releases Findings.
Government Repression is Destabilising.

FROM INTERVIEW TO DOCUMENTARY

On June 28 & 29 a two-part "documentary" appeared on Singapore TV entitled "Tracing the Conspiracy". It was clear from the public disbelief of the government's allegations which arose from Vincent Cheng's June 9 interview-type "confession" that a different format would be required for subsequent "confessions". It is said that Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew was not happy with the way the 4 journalists so obviously put words into Vincent's mouth. Also it is known that it took many attempts to video the form of words that the security police wanted Vincent to say because he broke down many times during filming as a result of the interrogation and torture he had been subjected to.

So this time the documentary-type "confession" was used so that a commentator could supply the government interpretation of what the detainees were saying and fabricate connections in order to prove the existence of a "plot". A documentary also, unlike an interview, permits heavy editing without raising suspicions of overt manipulation.

All the remaining 15 persons who were detained on May 21 appeared in the documentary. It attempted to connect Vincent Cheng and the Polytech Students' Union, UK graduates, Workers' Party, Third Stage drama group and Tan Wah Piow. If the government commentary was excluded from the script, an impression would be gained of dedicated and sincere people trying to carry out their concern to build a better society in Singapore. They were clearly against using violent means and their individual actions have broken no laws. No new allegations were made by the government during the documentary and no evidence was given to support the allegations made originally by the Ministry of Home Affairs. The Singapore Government is clearly relying solely on squeezing self-incriminating statements from the detainees by means of interrogation and torture.

CATHOLIC BISHOP DISMISSES CONFESSION

Even before the Singapore Government made its second television attempt to convince the public, Catholic Bishop George Pell of Melbourne gave a sermon on 18 June in which he stated:

"There is no doubt that one of the most confusing and disconcerting aspects of the whole Singapore affair is the public confession of one of the sixteen arrested, Vincent Cheng...I have studied (it) closely... It is quite clear that Vincent could never have been considered a serious personal threat to the state of Singapore. It remains to be proved, even taking his interview at face value, that he has confessed to anything which would entail a legal penalty in a similar situation in Australia. He wanted to change the government; more than 40% (at least) of Australians would be guilty of that charge!"

INTERROGATION & TORTURE

New evidence has come to hand of the security police using the same inhuman techniques that were documented by Amnesty International in their 1978 report on Singapore. As reported previously, the present detainees have been subjected to the "normal" Singapore practice of solitary confinement, depriving them of their watches, of sleep, of reading material and giving them long periods of continuous interrogation by rotating teams of interrogators for up to 72 hours at a stretch. It is now known that the present detainees have also been subjected to the cold treatment. They have been interrogated in a very cold room with an air-conditioner blowing icy air over them; they are then doused with cold water as they are questioned. Also some of the present detainees have been physically beaten and have had threats made against their families during interrogation.

The result of more than a month of this treatment has left most detainees disoriented, depressed and confused. Some are said by their families to be trying constantly to identify what they have done wrong because their interrogation has left them feeling guilty. Some of them try to justify their arrest. Yet since they have done nothing wrong, this adds to their confusion.

THE SIX ARRESTED ON JUNE 20

The six community leaders arrested on June 20 are now being subjected to full interrogations but there have been no announcements or fabricated "confessions" to date. It is assumed that with their detentions the government is probably satisfied that it has crushed all possibility of credible parliamentary opposition leadership for the next decade. However, other community leaders are still being threatened with a "third sweep". (Correction: UPDATE 7 took the names of the 6 from the news so a spelling mistake crept in. Mr Noor Affandi Shahid should read Mr Nur Effendi Sahid.)

RELEASE IS NOT FREEDOM

The three Singaporean detainees released on June 20 (the fourth

was a Malaysian) have to observe the following conditions according to THE STRAITS TIMES of June 21: "They cannot leave Singapore without the written approval of the Internal Security Department director; they cannot join or help in any society without his written consent; and they cannot associate with, take part in or assist in the activities of any organisation which, through its publications, statements or other activities, has shown itself to be used in propagating Marxism or communism." These restrictions have been placed upon people who have been charged with nothing and convicted of nothing. They are thereby excluded from participating in Catholic social justice groups as well as the main legal opposition party.

If the Singapore Government follows its normal practice it will keep pressure on the released detainees to act as its agents in implicating others and breaking trust among community leaders not yet arrested.

DEFENCE LAWYERS HARRASSED

Defence lawyers for the detainees are being harrassed by the security police. Some are receiving threatening messages ("We are waiting for you"), others are being followed to their offices and homes. It must be assumed that by pressurising families and lawyers, the government hopes to forestall legal challenges to the detentions.

STUDENTS' UNION DISBANDS

After weeks of government pressure both through the arrest of two council members on June 20 (Fan Wang Peng & Ronnie Ng Soon Hiang) and through the Polytech administration, the Singapore Polytech Students' Union (SPSU) disbanded last week.

On June 6, Fan Wang Peng, Acting President of SPSU, wrote to the Home Affairs minister saying that the Union had never been penetrated, manipulated and influenced by communists and that the Ministry's charges were detrimental to the Union's reputation. She further demanded that the detainees be released unconditionally or charged in court. The government and the Polytech administration immediately moved to undermine her position. The Polytech principal rang up leaders of clubs and asked them to state their stand with regard to Ms Fan's letter. There was then a move by clubs to dissociate themselves from Ms Fan's stand. Resignations from the SPSU Council followed and then Ms Fan was detained without trial herself on June 20.

INTERNATIONAL MISSION OF JURISTS

An International Mission of Jurists will visit Singapore for 5 days from July 5 to investigate the detentions. The Mission will consist of a team of eminent lawyers from Japan, France, Indonesia, Malaysia and New Zealand representing the International Commission of Jurists (Geneva), the International Federation of Human Rights (Paris), the Asian Human Rights Commission (Hongkong) and Lawasia (Sydney).

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL REPORTS

In a press release on June 26, Amnesty International said that it believed, on the basis of information gathered by its fact-finding mission which visited Singapore 14-21 June, that "12 people detained without charge or trial by administrative order in Singapore last week were prisoners of conscience who should be released immediately." Although 4 of the original 16 were released, the statement noted that another 6 had been arrested and that all 18 now being held should be released unconditionally. AI concluded all were detained "because of their legitimate, non-violent activities in church, community, arts, workers and student groups".

GOVERNMENT TRIES HUMOUR

On June 27 THE STRAITS TIMES reported a speech by former Foreign Minister and Lee-confidant Mr S Rajaratnam. Once respected for his leadership, Mr Rajaratnam is now widely seen as a somewhat garrulous elder politician who amuses his audience with anecdotes, this time about foxes and chickens. It is unlikely that the public is more than amused by his outbursts on the threat to Singapore of "an army of Marxists in clerical collars". However, his reference to the government's confusion over why about 200 organisations from around the world should bother to protest the detentions shows the government is rattled by the level of international concern. He implies that these organisations are not revealing their real motivation and that "One must assume that worldwide stakes are involved": a shallow attempt to smear international moral outrage as part of the same "Marxist conspiracy".

GOVERNMENT MP RECEIVES ROASTING

Singapore MP Dr Lau Teik Soon's apologetics before the NZ Parliament's Foreign Affairs Select Committee on June 25 were similarly unsuccessful. His appeal that if Marxists were allowed to continue their work in Singapore it would lead to violence and bloodshed clearly failed to convince parliamentarians that it was therefore necessary to arrest every church worker or community leader that disagreed with government policy. He was questioned vigorously by NZ Government MP Jim Anderton who said he could not condone such actions and that they "could create stress and strain in the relationship between New Zealand and Singapore".

DETENTIONS DESTABILISING

Far from giving confidence in its stability by "nipping the Marxist conspiracy in the bud", the Singapore Government's repressive actions have caused many to question why a stable government would need to shut away church and community workers on the basis of such obviously unfounded allegations.

LEE COULD DESTROY SINGAPORE

As early as June 2, Hongkong's respected daily THE SOUTH CHINA MORNING POST commented editorially on the detentions: "If Lee Kuan Yew is the principal architect of modern Singapore which, until recently at least, was an economically and politically

viable city state, he also has the power to destroy it, and some people think he has begun. What credible evidence of substance could there be in today's Singapore to justify the arrests, under communist subversion laws, of Catholic activists?"

Malaysian Parliamentary Opposition Leader, Lim Kit Siang, asked, "Has Singapore's national stability, security and resilience become so fragile that Madam Jenny Chin and the 15 can really pose a grave security threat to the island State?"

COMPARISON TO FIJI

Mr Jim Anderton, a NZ Government MP and former President of the ruling Labour Party, issued an open letter to Singapore's Minister of Home Affairs condemning the detentions. He observed, "The recent collapse of democracy in Fiji and the destabilising effect such trends have on both domestic and international relationships should be of concern to us all." On June 24 in the Parliamentary Select Committee on Foreign Affairs, Mr Anderton questioned visiting Singapore MP, Dr Lau Teik Soon, on the detentions and said that the NZ Army battalion stationed in Singapore could be seen as lending tacit support "to the Singaporean Government's continuing repression of its political opponents."

"Repression of this kind," Mr Anderton said, "is not actually in the long-term interests of stability."

SOUTH AFRICA, CUBA, SINGAPORE

By its draconian actions the Singapore Government has also invited uncomplimentary associations. Catholic Bishop George Pell of Melbourne led a cathedral mass on June 18 to "express my personal and official support for these victims (in Singapore)... We also pray tonight for all prisoners of conscience throughout the world, whether they be in South Africa, South America, Cuba or the hundreds of camps in the Soviet Union or any other part."

TAN WAH PIOW REPLIES

Last week Tan Wah Piow launched in London his book "Let the People Judge" which refutes in detail the government allegations and establishes the social democratic basis of his politics, his opposition to communism and his commitment to the rule of law.



**amnesty
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AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL CALLS FOR RELEASE OF CHURCH WORKERS AND OTHERS HELD
WITHOUT TRIAL UNDER SINGAPORE'S INTERNAL SECURITY ACT

Amnesty International said today (Friday 26 June 1987) that it believed that 12 people detained without charge or trial by administrative order in Singapore last week were prisoners of conscience who should be released immediately.

The worldwide human rights organization said its call for their unconditional release was based on information gathered by its fact-finding mission which visited Singapore from 14 to 21 June. After consulting a wide variety of sources, including government officials, the mission had confirmed Amnesty International's earlier belief that the group had been imprisoned solely for non-violently exercising its rights to freedom of expression and association.

A two-year detention order was imposed on Vincent Cheng, 40, a top official of the Catholic Justice and Peace Commission, and one-year orders were imposed on 11 other church and community workers on 20 June. These twelve and four others had been arrested on 21 MAY 1987 under Singapore's Internal Security Act (ISA) and accused of involvement in a Marxist plot to overthrow the government.

No evidence was made public except for a "confession" by Vincent Cheng broadcast on television. Amnesty International says this "confession" must be seen in the context of interrogation practices used under the ISA. These customarily included prolonged solitary confinement, continuous interrogation under extreme psychological pressure by rotating teams of interrogators, absence of lawyers and the threat of indefinite detention without trial.

The organization also noted that Vincent Cheng's confession was heavily edited before being telecast in the form of a press interview.

Amnesty International said its concerns about the "confession" and interrogation procedures remained, in spite of assurances by the authorities that the detainees had been well treated and had been granted access to doctors and lawyers.

Four of the original 16 arrested were released on 20 June but another six people were then arrested for alleged involvement in the plot. Amnesty International says they, too, should be released immediately and unconditionally. All 18 detainees are being held because of their legitimate, non-violent activities in church, community, arts, workers and student groups, it says.

Amnesty International welcomes the release of the four originally arrested, but it says conditions imposed on three of them should be lifted.

The mission delegates were Soli Sorabjee, a senior advocate of the Supreme Court of India, and a member of Amnesty International's International Secretariat.

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