



Emergency committee for human rights
in Singapore _____

UPDATE NO.9
SINGAPORE HUMAN RIGHTS ALERT

15 JULY 1987

JURISTS VISIT SINGAPORE. TORTURE CONFIRMED. MORE VIDEO-TAPING.
OPPOSITION EMERGES WITHIN SINGAPORE. ARCHBISHOP TARGET OF
PROTEST. CREDIBILITY GAP PUTS GOVT ON DEFENSIVE. US MEDIA TAKES
UP THE CASE. MINISTER'S POLITICAL FUTURE AT STAKE. BOYCOTT OF
SINGAPORE AIRLINES TAKES OFF.

JURISTS EXPRESS GRAVE CONCERN

After 5 days of investigations in Singapore the International Mission of Jurists issued a press release on July 9 before its departure from the island state expressing "its grave concern over:

1. The statement of the Singapore Government indicating that the persons detained will not be prosecuted under the normal rules of due process of law, with the assistance of counsel, and undergo a fair trial according to the principles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.
2. The use of the Internal Security Act in a situation where there seems to be no apparent danger of organised violence against people, property or government of Singapore, and no need for such extraordinary measures...
3. The use made by the Singapore authorities of the televised public "confessions" by the detainees is incompatible with internationally recognised human rights principles and the rule of law. Furthermore, the Mission seriously questions the credibility of these "confessions" in light of the consistent and credible testimonies it received regarding the pressures used to obtain such "confessions".
4. The difficulty of reconciling the claim of a "Marxist conspiracy" with the convincing testimonies the Mission received regarding the character, faith and activities of the detainees and their apparent commitment to furthering social justice within a democratic Singapore."

AUTHORITATIVE LEGAL MISSION

The International Mission of Jurists will have broad influence in the international community as it represented highly respected legal and human rights bodies: the International Commission of Jurists (Geneva), the International Federation of Human Rights (Paris), the Asian Human Rights Commission (Hongkong) and the

Japan Civil Liberties Union. Jurists on the Mission were from Indonesia, France, Japan and New Zealand.

TORTURE CONFIRMED AGAIN

Mission member and law lecturer, Ms Jane Kelsey, said on her return to New Zealand that the Mission had established details of the arrests and the treatment of the prisoners. These included: arrests made between 2 am and 5 am; detainees' families were not told where they were being taken; the detainees were not seen by anybody for 5 days during which "intensive interrogation" was carried out; general pattern was 2 days of continuous interrogation, 30 minutes rest, then 72 hours more non-stop, thus keeping the detainees awake for 5 days continuously; many of them were given the "cold treatment" which means interrogation in a freezing room under an air-conditioner; some were also doused with cold water; at least one person was forced to stand for the entire interrogation; detainees have been held in solitary confinement throughout and still are in solitary confinement. When the Mission left Singapore all the detainees were reported to be held in the Whitley Road Holding Centre, the main Special Branch interrogation centre. Ms Kelsey also noted that free access to lawyers was denied.

(In its 1978 report on Singapore, Amnesty International stated it had "found convincing evidence that torture has been used during interrogation at the Whitley Road Holding Centre". It documented the routine use of all the methods described above as well as beatings, electric shock treatment, beating of genitals and forcing spouses to watch each other being beaten.)

GOVERNMENT REFUSAL

Despite several requests both before and during the Mission's visit to Singapore, the Singapore Government refused to meet the Mission or to allow the Mission to see the detainees. However, the Mission met with representatives of the Law Society, lawyers, families of the detainees and political and community leaders. The Mission is preparing a full report on its findings.

DEFENCE LAWYERS STILL HARRASSED

Five Australian lawyers from Melbourne wrote to the Home Affairs Minister on June 23 urging him to respect the independence and integrity of the detainees' lawyers. "They have a right and a duty under the Singapore Constitution...to represent their clients without fear, favour or affection. If those rights and duties are undermined so is the Singapore legal system and its international respect." In a 24 June reply, the Ministry said, "Your letter comes as a surprise as well as a disappointment as no action whatsoever has been taken against any or all of the lawyers..." However, Government pressure is being kept on detainees and their families to discharge their lawyers. Security police are also harrassing the defence lawyers by making obvious their 24 hour surveillance of them and their homes, especially after they met with the International Mission of

Jurists. To date no detainee has taken any legal steps to challenge their detention.

A DIFFERENT INTERROGATION

The interrogation of Mr Chew Kheng Chuan, Harvard graduate and owner of a typesetting firm arrested on June 20, indicates a new approach by the government. Mr Chew's interrogation has taken the form of a pseudo-academic debate on ideological issues. A book he was writing with others analysing the 1984 general election has been confiscated and will no doubt be twisted to support the government's conspiracy theories. It may be that, since Mr Vincent Cheng's image as a sincere community worker has not been dented by his TV appearance, the Govt is looking for a local "ideologue" to fit into its conspiracy. (It should be added that the Government's claims that Mr Chew had very much to do with the UK student organisation FUESSO during his time at the London School of Economics are untrue.)

THE MANDARIN VERSION

On the evenings of 13 & 14 July, Singapore TV showed, in two parts, Mandarin versions of the 3 English productions of the "confessions" of Mr Vincent Cheng and the 15 other detainees. Ms Lim Li-Kok spoke in Mandarin. It was a word for word translation of what was said in English previously.

MORE VIDEOTAPING

The 6 detained on June 20 have begun videotaping. Ms CHNG Suan Tze was taken to Phoenix Park on 14 July for outdoor taping at a rambling bungalow.

DETAINED LAWYER SERVED WITH ALLEGATIONS

Senior lawyer and member of the Law Society Council, Ms Teo Soh Lung, was served with a detention order detailing the allegations against her. These include facilitating infiltration of the Workers' Party and of the Law Society, the latter together with detained lawyer Ms Tang Fong Har.

HUSBAND ATTESTS TO WIFE'S INNOCENCE

On June 20, the day of his wife's arrest (Ms Tang Fong Har), Mr Peter Poon Cheuk Yeung issued a press statement because the ISA "does not give a person the right to reply". He said Ms Tang has no desire to establish a communist state or society in Singapore. "She has however shown that she is a lawyer who cares about human rights and welfare of the people of Singapore in her professional and daily life." He detailed her voluntary commitments and free legal aid to church organisations. He appealed for her release or the right to reply in a court of law.

THE NEXT DEADLINE

The Government must announce its unilaterally decided fate for the 6 detained on June 20 on 18/19 July. It must either release them (probably with heavy restrictions on their civil rights and personal freedom) or serve them with renewable detention orders for up to 2 years.

CRITICISM EMERGES WITHIN SINGAPORE

Mr Devan Nair, Singapore's President until 1985, sharply criticised PM Lee Kuan Yew in a speech on June 23. Acknowledging the advances made by the PAP in the past, Mr Nair went on "...a protective hedge in the shape of restrictive and punitive legislation has been built around the present generation of government leaders, as if they were tender saplings... Today our political leaders appear to strive for the impossible - greater support through greater control - a flagrant contradiction in terms." He added: "The only explanation which occurs to me for the shadows which increasingly dim the lights of this nation, is that the brilliance of conception and execution for which we won renown in the past, is today left untutored by wisdom."

LEADING LAWYER CALLS FOR INTERNATIONAL PRESSURE

Mr Francis Seow, president of the Singapore Law Society until last year, addressed the Lawasia Conference in Kuala Lumpur in early July. He called for continued international pressure on the Singapore Govt to release unconditionally the 18 people detained under the Internal Security Act. He criticised the Singapore Law Society for not speaking out on the matter, noting that its role had been truncated by the recent amendments to the Legal Profession Act which he opposed. Mr Seow encouraged Singaporeans to voice their concern about the erosion of human rights to the authorities. "However," he said, "most Singaporeans are afraid to speak up." The burden on lawyers to act as "the sentinel of the people" on fundamental liberties and human rights issues is greater when the press is "neutered and docile or muzzled".

Lawasia is the association of law societies and bar associations for Asia and the Pacific.

RESPECTED LEADER LAUNCHES BOOK

Revered former leader of the Malaysian parliamentary opposition, Tan Sri Dr Tan Chee Khoon, launched Mr Tan Wah Piow's book "LET THE PEOPLE JUDGE" at a ceremony in Kuala Lumpur on 26 June. Dr Tan said; "I have no hesitation in fully supporting Tan Wah Piow's views and the book. It clearly shows that if one harboured no violent thoughts against the Government, one should not be made to recant his beliefs." The book is a comprehensive answer to all the questions the Singapore Government is posing with regard to the so-called "Marxist conspiracy".

ARCHBISHOP IS TARGET OF CATHOLIC PROTEST

Singapore Archbishop Gregory Yong was the target of protest during his visit to Kota Kinabalu, the capital city of the Malaysian state of Sabah, on June 27. At the installation service for a new bishop held in Sacred Heart Cathedral which Archbishop Yong attended, a group of Catholic lay people distributed a four-page leaflet. It accused the Singapore Government of violating basic human rights and criticised

Archbishop Yong for his abdication of pastoral responsibility for the detainees.

Church authorities objected to the distribution of the leaflet. One of the group subsequently went to the police to make a counter-charge against the church authorities of harassment and threat but was himself detained overnight on suspicion of having committed a "seditious act". The next day a magistrate threw the charge out and freed the man. The matter was widely covered in the local newspapers.

INCONSISTENT GOVERNMENT CASE

The Singapore Government is losing its reputation for consistency by giving differing versions of its allegations to different people. An example is a June 9 letter from its Washington Embassy under the signature of Bilahari Kausikan to the Hawaii office of the American Friends Service Committee. The letter stated that the detainees were arrested "because of their links with the communist movement, which has advocated "armed struggle", and continues in its efforts to overthrow by unconstitutional means the established political and social order in Singapore".

CREDIBILITY GAP

In fact, a yawning credibility gap has resulted from the Singapore Government's detention of the 22 community leaders, 18 of whom are still held without trial. The worldwide reaction to the arrests has been that, if the government has any case against the detainees, it should bring them to open trial according to due process.

WASHINGTON POST

On June 15, under the headline "Singapore Acts to Bar Dissent", the WASHINGTON POST reported that "...the arrests, and a recent press crackdown, are part of a concerted effort to stamp out all forms of opposition to the ruling People's Action Party (PAP), as Lee prepares for local elections and for the possible naming of his successor if he steps down next year as he said he might." (Many observers expect Lee to instal himself as an executive president and his son to take over the routine running of the government either as PM or the power behind the PM.)

THE GUARDIAN

The British newspaper, THE GUARDIAN, on June 26 quoted a diplomat as saying "What we have is a group of socially concerned people with various brands of liberation theology, socialism, perhaps even Marxism. But a group of dedicated Marxist conspirators? I think not." The paper reported scepticism amongst professionals in Singapore over the existence of any Marxist plot and concluded that analysts say the latest sweep of arrests was "a round-up, aimed at putting Singapore in a water-tight position for the transition of power".

ASIAN MEDIA ALSO SCEPTICAL

The conservative ASIAN WALL STREET JOURNAL has stated that the alleged Marxist subversives sounded more like "student activists" whose statements "held no descriptions of making bombs or using secret codes, nor of meeting with foreign agents. Nor were there details on an overthrow of the Government".

The SOUTH CHINA MORNING POST (Hongkong) on July 8 stated that "diplomatic sources see the crackdown as a roundup and an effective neutralisation of potentially radical opponents. Mr Lee, they say, is known to be concerned about his ruling People's Action Party and its poor performance in the last elections in 1984. With his stated intention of stepping down in the next two years, Mr Lee is smoothing the way for Singapore's transition to second generation leadership. As one Western diplomat said "He's clearing the decks before disembarking"."

On July 2 the influential FAR EASTERN ECONOMIC REVIEW noted that "there are many sceptics" with regard to the government's accusations of using church organisations to spread Marxist ideas. It further reported that church workers "contend the arrests were designed to squash religiously motivated dissent and a type of social activism perceived by the government to be a potential source of opposition". In a letter to the FEER published on July 9, eight legal academics and lawyers from Australia called on the Lee Govt speedily to bring the 18 detainees to trial or release them unconditionally. They further expressed scepticism concerning "whether Lee and his relevant officers can distinguish between political dissent and security threats".

The July 2 issue of FEER quoted Philippine Catholic Bishop Francisco Claver as saying that the arrests in Singapore seem like a new version of an old story. "Governments, landlords, anyone in a position of power that feels threatened by talk about justice immediately throws out the communist accusation," he said. To label everyone pushing for social change a communist or even a Marxist is absurd, he stated.

COMPARISON TO LEBANON

Some observers are now comparing the forced TV "confessions" of the Singapore detainees to the videotapes of hostages in Lebanon made by their kidnappers. The recent videotape made by pro-Iranian extremists of American hostage Charles Glass saying he is a CIA agent is one example given. Of this video, White House spokesman Mr Marlin Fitzwater said, "The history of these kinds of videotapes suggests that they are often done under coercion and perhaps even torture."

GOVERNMENT ON DEFENSIVE

Being put on the defensive by such an unexpectedly strong international reaction and by the huge credibility gap it suffers from, the Singapore Govt has been using the STRAITS TIMES to

counter the tide of criticism and disbelief. Home Affairs Minister, Prof S Jayakumar, has taken the leading role.

WORRIED BY US MEDIA COVERAGE

On July 4 the government showed its anxiety over the June 15 WASHINGTON POST article by reprinting it in the STRAITS TIMES together with a reply by Mr Tommy Koh, Singapore's Ambassador to the US. (The Government did not reprint the last 7 paragraphs of the POST article which detailed PM Lee's "heated exchange" with detained lawyer Ms Teo Soh Lung at last year's parliamentary hearings, the "orchestrated" removal of the editor of the STRAITS TIMES PRESS, restrictions on foreign publications which "drew criticism from American businessmen and from the State Department" and the expulsion of the Far Eastern Economic Review correspondent.)

On the same day, the STRAITS TIMES also reprinted a June 15 letter to the Home Affairs Minister from ten concerned US Congress members together with a reply from the Minister entitled "Preventive Detention Underpins Our Freedom".

"THE UNSEEN HAND"

On July 6, the STRAITS TIMES published a series of articles centred on the Home Affairs Minister's speech on July 5 to a PAP Youth Wing seminar. His speech entitled "The Marxist Conspiracy: An Unfinished Story and the Unseen Hand" received the newspaper front page headline "WAH PIOW PUPPET IN DEADLY GAME". The subtitle was: "Marxist conspirator being manipulated by others more cunning and sinister: Jayakumar".

In the STRAITS TIMES of July 8 the Minister employs a question and answer format to respond to international criticism of his government's actions. Distortions are purveyed in these July 4, 6 and 8 editions of the government newspaper:

1. Replying to the Congress members, the Minister claims Singapore's history is different from the USA and that, to combat threats of subversion "the usual procedures of court trials ... have proved totally inadequate. "Preventive detention," he says, "is not a blemish marring our record, it is a necessary power underpinning our freedom." He does not distinguish between "threats to the nation" and threats to the ruling People's Action Party.
2. He claims that the PAP victories in 6 successive general elections have been an endorsement by the electorate of the Internal Security Act and a rejection of "those who stood for the detainees" who he calls "the communists, their fellow travellers and some opposition MPs". He does not mention that most observers would see the victories as at least partially the result of the use of the Internal Security Act to crush electoral opposition.

3. He says: "At the coming elections, the people will decide whether this action was to forestall public disorder, violence and turmoil, or whether they should support the opposition, who claim it was to stifle dissent." This of course is a fairly safe bet: having locked up some of the potentially credible opposition and scared the rest, the government has already ensured the result of the next elections will be favourable to itself. The proposed grouping of opposition strongholds into "team constituencies" with strong pro-government areas will effectively prevent the election of opposition candidates also.

4. The Minister says Vincent Cheng has admitted to being a Marxist in contact with Filipino communists, to setting up a communist network, to infiltrating legitimate organisations and to building up pressure groups for confrontation with the Government. This "confession" has already been widely discounted internationally as incompatible with the Rule of Law and recognised principles of human rights. But the Minister now seeks to side-step this by claiming, "Well, first of all, the reason for having the TV programmes is not in order for them to confess. The reason for the TV programme is really for them to tell the story for Singaporeans to hear it first-hand." There is, of course, no such distinction.

5. The Minister said: "Vincent Cheng and the 15 are puppets in a larger, more sinister and more dangerous game. Who is the puppet master? Not Tan Wah Piow - he must be a puppet in the larger game." By continuing on this theme the Minister appears to be: (a) setting the scene for more detentions, (b) removing again the burden from the Government of proving convincingly that the detainees are involved in a "Marxist conspiracy" by using the excuse that the real powers remain in the shadows, (c) preparing the public for even more far-fetched accusations against the 6 persons detained on June 20.

6. The Minister said that Tan Wah Piow is willing to return to Singapore if he is assured of not being arrested. Prof Jayakumar further stated that no such immunity would be given, "There are many criminals abroad who'd like to come back if we tell them, look, we will not arrest you. It's absurd." This appears to be the Government's distortion of and response to Mr Tan's offer to the Government "to meet any number of their interrogators, at any neutral place, in the presence of journalists, observers and television cameras".

7. The Minister denied torturing detainees saying, "It just can't be done. And we don't do it." This is at odds with PM Lee's admission in 1978 that "all interrogations must wear down resistance of (detainees) by sustained psychological pressure, including physical fatigue, to get them to give leads..." (FEER, 24 Feb. 1978.) It is also at odds with all the evidence to date. The Minister noted that no relative, lawyer or released detainee in the present case has complained of ill-treatment. This is actually a condemnation of the government as it shows the

effectiveness of continuing restrictions on former detainees and the threats made against lawyers and family if they openly raise complaints to the authorities. However, the forthcoming reports of Amnesty International and the International Mission of Jurists will no doubt examine the evidence in full.

8. The Minister poses a number of questions on Tan's escape from Singapore: how he did it, who supported him etc. These questions have been answered in full by Tan and others many times but not published in Singapore. The Government therefore is able to pretend there is something sinister about the answers.

MINISTER'S POLITICAL FUTURE ON LINE

Because none of the above defenses of the Government position have been very convincing either domestically or internationally, it must be assumed that the Minister of Home Affairs' political future is at stake. Having built up the image of Mr Tan Wah Piow to the level of another Ninoy Aquino, he has created an "enemy" who is bigger and more impressive than any government leader with the exception of the PM. Now, to play this down, he claims Mr Tan is a "puppet". It seems the entire fabricated edifice of a conspiracy is in danger of falling apart. The quietness of the Government over the 6 detainees arrested on June 20 may indicate a careful sizing up by the Government of the most self-justifying political scenario that can be constructed around them.

BOYCOTT OF SINGAPORE AIRLINES

Hongkong solidarity groups are launching an international boycott of Singapore Airlines which is more than 50% owned by the Singapore Government. Beginning on July 18 (the day for announcing the fate of the 6 newly arrested detainees) the boycott will climax in a SOLIDARITY WEEK ending August 9 which is the National Day of Singapore. More information on this campaign can be obtained from Friends of Singapore, 13D, 128, Lai Chi Kok Road, Kowloon, Hongkong. Tel: 3-911 934.

MORE ACTIONS IN USA

A petition has been launched at Harvard in support of detainee Mr Chew Kheng Chuan. The Presbyterian Church (USA) based in Atlanta has written to the Minister of Home Affairs stating "we find such allegations hard to accept" and requesting "that they be released until found guilty in a court of law". Recent media coverage has included Newsday and National Public Radio.

EMERGENCY COMMITTEE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS IN SINGAPORE (NZ)
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Singapore accused of torture

THE Singapore Government has been accused of using psychological torture on suspects detained recently under its Internal Security Act.

By PAUL SMITH

Auckland law lecturer Jane Kelsey, who made the allegation yesterday, spent last week in Singapore with an international mission of jurists that gathered information on the arrests of 22 people.

Just over two months ago 18 people were arrested under the act in a series of dawn raids. Ten of them were Catholic lay workers. The government alleged that its swoop broke up a communist conspiracy.

Three weeks ago six more people were arrested. Only four of the total have been freed. The others have been detained and, without trial, sent to prison for terms of up to two years.

Ms Kelsey representing the Asian Human Rights Commission, went to Singapore with an Indonesian lawyer from the International Commission of Jurists and a French lawyer from the International Federation for Human Rights.

Despite their requests, they were unable to meet the prime minister or the minister of home affairs over the arrests. Requests to meet the prisoners were also denied.

Ms Kelsey said the mission had established details of the arrests and the treatment of the prisoners.

She said the arrests had been made between 2am and 5am.

"The detainees' families were not told where they were being taken," she said.

"They heard no more about them for up to five days."

She said those arrested were taken to interrogation centres where "intensive interrogation" was carried out over the next five days.

"The general pattern of this was about two days of continuous interrogation, with a period of 30 minutes' rest," she said.

"Then there was 72 hours of interrogation non-stop. The people were effectively kept awake for a five-day period on top of their early morning arrest."

She said the interrogation varied from person to person, but

many of them had been given what was called the "cold treatment".

"It involves questioning in an extremely cold air-conditioned room, where the air conditioner is far too powerful for the size of the room," she said.

The interrogators worked in relays, wearing warm clothing.

"The detainees were sometimes doused with cold water. In several cases the detainees were required to stand up for most of the time. In one case we believe a person had to stand for the entire period of the interrogation."

Ms Kelsey said that after the five days there was a respite, and the prisoners' families were allowed to see them.

"This was for a half-hour in the presence of the case officer, who was an internal security officer in charge of the detainee," she said.

"They (the detainees) were told they were not permitted to discuss the cases nor permitted to discuss the conditions of their detention."

Ms Kelsey said the prisoners were told that if they co-operated and did not retain lawyers, they would stand a greater chance of being freed early. Those who did obtain lawyers found their counsel were not allowed free access to them, she said.

The mission's statement deploras what it says was a denial of due process of law.

It also says the use made by Singapore authorities of the televised public "confessions" by the prisoners is incompatible with human rights principles and the rule of law.

The mission questions the credibility of these confessions in the light of "consistent and credible testimonies" it received regarding the pressures used to obtain such confessions.

The mission will report on the human rights situation in Singapore to each of the organisations represented in the legal team.