

Airing a confession

Alleged ringleader buttresses government's care

By Margaret Scott In Hongkong

Bolstering its case for detaining 16 suspected communist conspirators, the Singapore Government, on 9 June, televised a confessional interview with Vincent Cheng, the man at the centre of the government's allegations that the Roman Catholic Church has been used by Marxists.

Interviewed by four local journalists, Cheng, the most senior of the 10 church workers included in the 21 May round-up (REVIEW, 4 June), up-held two pillars of the government's case: he called the church a "ready cover" for his activities and agreed that he had been working with the former student leader Tan Wah Piow, the alleged mastermind of the conspiracy, now living in England.

Altogether, Cheng's answers to scores of questions seemed to substantiate the charges that he and Tan had deliberately set out to infiltrate organisations and recruit Marxists. However, Cheng one minute said he and Tan desired "a classless society" in Singapore, and the next minute expressed doubt about communism. The interview had been expected since it has become customary for the government to televise confessions of those held without trial under the Internal Security Act. Since the roundup, priests and associates of those arrested have voiced concern that pressure might be applied by the government to obtain confessions.

Cheng's interview, in which he appeared to be voluntarily answering questions, followed a series of pronouncements by Archbishop Gregory Yong accepting the government's edict that religious leaders stay out of politics. Four activist priests have been banned from preaching and barred from any involvement in an assortment of church organisations. Cheng said three of the priests had agreed with his activities.

The archbishop's restrictions on the priests' activities, announced on 5 June, signalled the church's determination to distance itself from the 16 people.

The four priests had rejected the government's allegations and viewed the round-up as an attack on the church, designed to crush the small but growing web of activists critical of government policies. The priests were the leading voices within the church urging Yong to condemn the detentions.

Instead, Yong, after a lengthy meeting on 2 June with Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew, endorsed the government's case against Cheng and said the church had been infiltrated by Marxists.

The priests are: Joseph Ho, chairman of the Justice and Peace Commis-

sion (JPC); Patrick Goh, national chairman of the Young Christian Workers' Movement (YCWM) and a member of the JPC; Edgar D'Souza associate editor of the archdiocese's bi-weekly newspaper, *The Catholic News*, and Guillaume Arotcarena, director of the Catholic Centre for Foreign Workers (CCFW). These organisations figured in the government's allegations that the church had been used by a network of Marxists plotting to form a communist state.

Cheng was the executive secretary of the JPC, a Vatican-inspired institute set up to promote church involvement in local issues. The nine other detained church workers were scattered among the other organisations either as employees or as volunteers. Now the future of these organisations is in jeopardy.

The CCFW, which provided a range of social services to Filipinas working in Singapore as maids, was closed by Yong

on the same day he banned the priests. Seven Filipinas staying at the centre were turned over to the Philippine Embassy. Arotcarena, the centre's director, has not been reassigned, and associates of his say they are worried he will be expelled from Singapore as he carries a French passport. The three other priests have predicted they will be sent to obscure parishes.

The latest issue of *The Catholic News*, which was entirely devoted to the detentions with reprints of the early statements of concern made by the church, was scuttled by the archbishop. The newspaper, which circulates among 12,000 Roman Catholics in Singapore and Malaysia, does not have an editor, but Yong has said it will meet its next deadline.

The YCWM, a social-service agency that looks after Malaysian and Indonesian temporary workers, is expected to survive. However, the fate of the JPC, missing its chairman and its executive secretary, remains hazy. After his flurry of announcements, including an order to all priests not to make any political comments in their sermons, Yong did not speak to reporters. However, on 6 June he told Singapore's *The Sunday Times* newspaper that the future of the commission would be given "very serious reflection." □

MALAYSIA

Gerakan's self-renewal

By Nick Seaward In Kuala Lumpur

Primaries Industries Minister Datuk Lim Keng Yaik has beaten off a strong challenge to his leadership of the Gerakan Party, the main multi-racial component of the ruling National Front. At the party's annual conference on 6 June, Lim polled 614 votes for the post of president, defeating his challenger, former deputy agriculture minister Goh Cheng Teik, by a margin of 247.

In a hard-hitting campaign, Goh had accused the Gerakan leadership of being "wishy-washy in its stand on high-level corruption in both private and public sectors" and of abandoning its multi-racial approach in favour of Chinese communalism. Goh had stopped short, however, of calling for a withdrawal from the front.

Although Lim won by a much larger margin than expected, Goh was able to claim with some justification that his criticisms had succeeded in bringing these issues to the fore at the annual conference. In his presidential address before the vote, Lim admitted that the party's performance in last year's general election had been less than satisfactory and blamed this on urban voters' racial bias and declining educational and economic opportunities.

Although Lim's speech stole much of Goh's thunder, it had little to do with his victory which was sealed a day earlier when party stalwarts Datuk Michael Chen and Lim Chong Eu supported him. Gerakan is now more firmly in the hands of Lim than ever before in his seven years of office. None of Goh's nominees for the posts of vice-president or the central committee was successful. Deputy president Datuk Paul Leong was returned unopposed.

This leaves the way clear for Lim to pursue his stated objective of linking up with other multi-racial parties in Malaysia and pressing the government for the replacement of the New Economic Policy with a less racially divisive framework. To that end, on the second day of the conference, delegates gave the party leadership a mandate to formalise a proposed confederation with Parti Bersatu Sabah, the ruling party in Sabah, "and others sharing the Malaysian concept and approach."