

AN ACCOUNT OF THE OCTOBER 1987 ISA DETENTIONS

KUA KIA SOONG

445 DAYS

BEHIND THE WIRE



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FOREWORD

by K.Das

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I think it is time we used the right words in looking at the ISA, that Insidious Suppression Apparatus, euphemistically known as the Internal Security Act.

A concentration camp by any other name is still a concentration camp. Auschwitz, Buchenwald and Dachau, one might say, were also "only" detention camps modelled on those temporary internment camps for enemy civilians during the Boer War. But behind the wire, the uniformed bullies were the power, without anyone to moderate them. There was, for example Mr. Rama Das in Kamunting. He told the detainees that there were hundreds of ISA rules in the book, but who cares about them?

And prolonged interrogation in a lock-up is torture, whatever the *jagas* may insist on calling these dialogue sessions. Poor food, absence of proper medical care, harsh lighting to prevent sleep, no books or poor lighting to discourage reading, solitary confinement - all these constitute torture, and there is no two ways about it.

And Dr. Kua Kia Soong writes here about his time in a concentration camp where he underwent torture for 15 months in the closing years of the 20th century.

And reading Dr. Kua's book I don't know whom I should feel more sorry for - the unconvicted "convicts" in our own Gulag or those sad, uniformed clowns of the totalitarian trade who are bidden by their masters to keep on turning the screw according to the book.

As this book shows, every tiresome question-and-answer session they devised was a prodigious, pointless exercise - involving intelligent men and some poor travesty of human beings. It was farce played out

in the dark. Nobody was watching, and so, of course, nobody was applauding.

And here is the mystery: why perform *wayang kulit* without the lantern?

And why go on performing these pointless shadow plays endlessly? Why not lock up the *patungs* and throw away the key? Why entertain the *cicaks* on the ceiling when they know the boring script after thousands of performances with hundreds of puzzled actors and frightened actresses?

Dr. Kua tells us a great deal about the Grand Kamunting Opera and the hit songs favoured there. He tells us that he had difficulty singing not only because the words were foolish but because the tunes were decidedly ugly. But he does not say why his keepers wanted him to sing at all.

My short answer is that it must be very frustrating to cage birds and discover that they are not singing birds.

This book is Dr. Kua's own song.

Sitting outside the wire, of course, many of us wise fellows moaned and groaned that Dr. Kua and Company were in distress while the rest of us were not. We felt guilty. We held meetings, ran an anxious telephone-chain services to keep the world informed, tried to rationalise why the Government chose Kua & Co. rather than Spiderman, Datuk Najib, Datuk Sanusi, Snoopy or Garfield, or even poor old me? Why only Dr. Kua Kia Soong and Mecnakshi Raman, Ustaz Bunyamin and Julian Jeyaseelan? Why not Tunku Abdul Rahman, or Dr. Tan Chee Koon while they were at it? And then there is retired Archbishop Vendargon.

We grumbled and argued and shed tears in our beer and cursed the Government. We were filled with righteous indignation and swore we would do this and that and the other to redress this nasty wrong. It should never happen to decent men and so on and etcetera and so forth.

But in truth many of us were also soiling our pants in terror.