

# Learn humility from history, Malaysian leader tells Australians

*Malaysian Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr. Mahathir Mohamad was obliged to tell some 105 members of the Australian Parliament to leave his country alone, in the letter we reprint below from the Malaysian daily the Star of May 30, 1988. These Australian parliamentarians had written Dr. Mahathir a very nasty letter dated March 18, deploring Malaysian "human rights violations." They then allowed the letter to be "made public" in the Australian capital of Canberra, where it was picked up by the international news agencies, and widely publicized by the press of Australian and ASEAN countries, the Star reported.*

*The issue was the arrest last October of more than 100 Malaysian citizens under Malaysia's Internal Security Act (ISA), which succeeded for a time in preventing strife among Malaysia's three ethnic groups (the population is about 50% Malay, 40% Chinese, and 10% Indian) from escalating into a repeat of the 1969 riots in which 240 people died. Many incidents were caused by actions by such opposition groups as the Chinese-based Democratic Action Party (DAP) and the Islamic fundamentalist party, the PAS, over religious, linguistic, and other highly charged issues, with international and Malaysian press and "activists" fanning the flames.*

*We print first the letter by the Australian MPs, and then Dr. Mahathir's reply.*

## **Australian MPs denounce Malaysia**

Dear Prime Minister,

We have been alarmed by reports in the Australian press which have stated that since Oct. 28 of last year, more than 100 Malaysian citizens have been arrested and detained under Section 73 of the ISA.

Those arrested included prominent Opposition Parliamentarians and civil rights activists such as the DAP leader Lim Kit Siang and Aliran leader Dr. Chandra Muzaffar.

Also arrested were numerous academics, trade union leaders, and consumer rights and anti-nuclear activists. Our press has reported that some of them were tortured.

Amnesty International regards those arrested not as threats to Malaysian internal security but as prisoners of conscience,

and the International Commission of Jurists has stated that the action is motivated by a desire to silence its political opposition.

We, the undersigned members of the Australian Parliament, wish to express to you our concern over the observance of accepted human rights standards in Malaysia.

We regard the laws under which these people were arrested as unworthy of a democratic state, and we believe the continued detention of these prisoners of conscience to be a gross violation of human rights.

## **Dr. Mahathir replies**

*Dr. Mahathir's letter, dated April 25, 1988, was addressed to Lewis Kent, MP from Hotham, who organized the Australian letter.*

The concern expressed by your Australian Members of Parliament over the arrests of Malaysians involved in instigating racial disharmony in Malaysia is laudable.

It would be more laudable if you cared to study carefully the facts and the background before you make your condemnation.

Unlike Australia, which was seized from the Aborigines and designated as a settlement for British criminals, Malaysia was populated with Malays when the British were invited to advise the Malay Sultans on modern administration.

As usual, the British simply took over the country and did as they pleased.

Ignoring the views of the indigenous people, they allowed wholesale immigration of incompatible Chinese and Indians. Thus, when we achieved independence, 50% of the population was made up of children of the immigrants.

The British colonial government practised a divide and rule policy and an autocratic system to ensure racial peace. Independent Malaysia opted for a democratic government, which subjects the government to constant pressure and threats by the irresponsible in the society.

Racists among them, whether Malays, Chinese, or Indians, continuously stir up racial animosities. The most blatant

racists are usually educated and are well versed in the manipulation of democratic freedom for their ends.

Their methods differ very little from the communist front organisations. Indeed, in many cases, they are the same people or they work together.

In 1969, race riots broke out because the government then did not read the signs. We are not going to allow that to happen. Acting after the outbreak is like locking the stables after [the horse is gone]. To be worthwhile, we must take preventive action according to the British-formulated Preventive Detention Act.

Academics, environmentalists, and leaders of consumer associations, etc. were not arrested because they were academics, etc. They were arrested because they instigated racial animosities.

Surely it is not suggested that academics or opposition members be exempted from the provisions of the law. It may interest you that many members of the government parties were also arrested, questioned, and some were detained. Those arrested are of all races and religious beliefs. We do not discriminate.

Since my government took over in 1981, most of the people detained under the ISA have been released. Under the three previous governments, some 2,000 people languished in detention.

Last year, there were only 300 hard-core communists who refused to forswear violence who remained in detention. Of 106 brought in for questioning last year, only 50 are detained.

Malaysian laws are harsh. They have to be if we are going to have stability in a country used to British authoritarian rule and consequently unfamiliar with democracy.

Most newly independent countries could not manage a democratic system and reverted to British-style authoritarian rule. Here the people can decide how harsh the laws should be by choosing the government they have faith in. We are not beholden to anyone else, least of all to MPs of some other nation.

When Australia was at the stage of Malaysia's present development, you solved your Aborigines' problem by simply shooting them. You made sure of your present white supremacy of your White Australia Policy. Even now, there is discrimination against coloured people.

If you are really not racist, you should do what the British did to us: admit as many Chinese and Indians as are willing to make Australia their home until they make up at least 50% of your population.

If at that stage they demand that Chinese and Indian be Australia's media of instruction and you comply, then we will listen to your views on how to run Malaysia.

In the meantime, please concentrate on fair treatment for Aborigines and the Asians in your midst, and leave us alone. Australians give themselves too many airs and think they should advise all the governments in Southeast Asia how to run their countries.

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## Malaysia

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# AFL-CIO dirty operation exposed

by Sophie Tanapura

The political forces behind the ongoing destabilization of Malaysia have been brought to light by recent government revelations that the AFL-CIO, citing violations of "human and trade union rights," has petitioned the U.S. Congress to revoke Malaysia's trade privileges under the Generalized System of Preference (GSP). The AFL-CIO itself claims it had done so at the urging of Dr. V. David, secretary general of the Malaysian Trade Union Congress (MTUC).

The irony of the present situation has not escaped Malaysia's outspoken prime minister, Dr. Mahathir Mohamad, who is reported in the June 6 Malaysian daily *The Star*, as saying that Dr. David, despite being a trade union leader, had been quite willing to victimize the workers, because the withdrawal of the GSP, which brings annual gains of about 350 million Malaysian dollars to the country, would greatly penalize the workforce.

Certainly, Dr. Mahathir's comments could also apply to the AFL-CIO, whose "Project Democracy" demands for "human rights" threaten to destroy the livelihood of workers globally. Malaysia, however, is not taking this meddling in its internal affairs lying down, and intends to fight the AFL-CIO petition. Dr. Mahathir, however, has warned that fighting the AFL-CIO may mean "they will resort to other actions which can bring losses to us." And indeed, as of this writing, Labor Minister Lee Kim Sai, together with MTUC President Zainal Rampak and Cuepacs President A. Ragnathan are attending the International Labor Organization (ILO) conference in Geneva, where "human rights" will be a major item on the agenda.

## 75,000 jobs threatened

As part of its counterattack, the government has released figures warning Malaysians that the loss of GSP trade privileges would jeopardize at least 75,000 jobs and investment in about 895 manufacturing companies. If agriculture-related industries are included, the figures would be even higher. According to Trade and Industry Minister Datin Paduka Rafidah Aziz, 11.74% of the country's 7.84 billion Malaysian dollars in exports to the United States are under the GSP program. Products included under GSP privileges are palm oil, fruit, rubber, plastic, metal products, plywood, and textiles.

Obviously, withdrawal of these privileges would seriously affect future investment in Malaysia as well, since much