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SPEECH BY MR S RAJARATNAM, SENIOR MINISTER (PRIME MINISTER'S OFFICE) AT A STUDENT FORUM ON "IS GOD A LIBERATION THEOLOGIAN?" AT THE NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF SINGAPORE LECTURE THEATRE 13 ON FRIDAY, 14 AUGUST 1987 AT 5.30 PM

Though I am not in the God business myself, I would like to state at the outset that I have it on the highest authority that the Creator has never had or will ever have anything to do with the now fashionable Liberation Theology because his last word on theology was stated officially and irrevocably well over a thousand years ago in the four Gospels. He therefore sees no compelling reason for a competing new theology.

So my address this afternoon will be devoted primarily to convincing you that Liberation Theology has nothing to do with God but with politicised priests, ambitious bishops and smart Communists. There is a need for a Liberation Theology simply because the Gospels avoid politics like the plague and Christ dismissed politics with his only reference to this distasteful subject: "Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's" - an injunction that some politically ambitious priests find frustrating. These theologians have therefore outwitted God - or so they think - by inventing Liberation Theology.

But before I revert to Liberation Theology I would like to dispose of a matter which may otherwise distract attention from my main theme - the arrest and detention of 22 foolish young men and women who played about with Liberation Theology. The Prime Minister in his National

Day speech touched on the irony of a group of well-heeled citizens enacting a bizarre drama that they were the liberators of an oppressed proletariat who were being clobbered blind and reduced to starvation by an unfeeling government in alliance with greedy capitalists.

There was a time when real poverty, unemployment and insanitary hovels dominated Singapore's social landscape. But desperate poverty no longer exists in Singapore but the 22 well-to-do young men and women had to invent poverty and oppression to enjoy the thrill of playing at revolution and who, in the process, found themselves enmeshed in a more sinister and dangerous revolution directed by men who were playing for high stakes and in which these 22 foolish men and women had no place.

The whole stupid venture into Liberation Theology in Singapore was summed up by lawyer Teo Soh Lung, one of the detainees. In response to the question by the TV interviewer whether, in the light of all that had happened, Miss Teo now felt that she has been made use of by others, she replied:

Teo: "Yes, in a way, I was made use of"  
 Questioner: "How do you feel about it?"  
 Teo: "How do I feel about it? That I was made use of? Stupid! I feel very stupid".

In my view almost all those detained, having regard to their background and psychological make up, could not just by themselves have constituted a serious threat. The readiness with which they started spilling the beans within a few weeks of their being detained suggests that they are not the stuff that do-or-die revolutionaries are made of. They, unlike an older generation of Marxist revolutionaries, wanted, as it were, to ride to revolution on, at least, a Mercedes 200.

But over a period of time their more ruthless manipulators could have transformed these expendable pawns into dangerous zombies.

It is my belief that after a period of satisfactory rehabilitation the remaining 15 detainees will, after their wrists having been duly slapped, be let out with the injunction to go and sin no more.

Another casualty in the Liberation Theology caper in Singapore is Mr J B Jeyaretnam. I don't think he was a conscious accomplice in the Liberation Theology conspiracy. He is too much of a misguided missile for conspirators to handle him safely. I have no doubt he believed that he was being propelled to political stardom on his own steam; his charisma. But those who are familiar with Communist operational methods know that the Communists are past masters in the technique of manipulating chosen targets without the target being aware of it.

When Mr David Marshall formed the Worker's Party, Communist infiltration of it contributed in no small measure to Mr Marshall's victory, though Mr Marshall was then not aware of it.

But when the Malaysian Communist Party decided, after the Plen's meeting with Mr Lee Kuan Yew, that it was in its interest to withdraw support from the Worker's Party, the party immediately collapsed. Mr Marshall retired permanently from politics and his abandoned party lay in the attic for years until Mr Jeyaretnam dusted it and brought it out for political airing. For years Mr Jeyaretnam fought and lost successive elections until he won the Anson by-election in 1981. At that time, Mr Jeyaretnam thanked the Almighty for the change in his political fortunes but as far as I am aware the only people who took an interest in this breach in PAP's monopoly of Parliament were the new

Marxists. It was then that they decided to manipulate the Worker's Party initially by remote control and after Mr Jeyaretnam talked himself out of his parliamentary seat, by cautious infiltration of it. We don't know what great plans the new Marxists had for Mr Jeyaretnam and his party but as a result of the arrest and detention last May of those who had infiltrated the Worker's Party, the steam has gone out of it and is once more in the attic, to await the arrival of the next hermit crab in search of a political home.

For Mr Jeyaretnam this is the end of a depressingly brief political journey though had he played his political cards with his head rather than as an exercise in psycho-drama, he might still be sitting next to Mr Chiam See Tong who, it seems to me, is a sharper politician in that he can distinguish between the protected freeways of opposition politics and the forbidden minefields.

The last of the casualties in the recently aborted attempt at subversion is Mr Tan Wah Piow. Unlike the others, Mr Tan and Mr Vincent Cheng, his local operative, it appears to me, were not innocent political virgins. It should not be forgotten that both were involved in the early 70s, in attempts to get our university students to be involved in militant trade union agitation against the government. This resulted in Mr Tan having to seek political asylum in the United Kingdom some ten years ago.

However, Mr Tan appears not to have done too badly out of the whole thing. He had the good fortune, despite a forged Singapore passport and the impediment of being an army deserter, to enter the United Kingdom without difficulty and stay there for ten years without being subjected to any of the harassment to which less privileged illegal immigrants are subjected. Further, despite being a drop-out from two universities - the University of Singapore

and of Bradford University in the U.K. - he has been accorded the unusual privilege of reading law at the prestigious Balliol College in Oxford, without any questions being asked.

Perhaps it would be more poignant were I to quote directly from a letter that Mr Tan Wah Piow wrote to one of his devotees in Singapore in September 1985 describing his plight as a hounded exile in London.

He and his wife, he writes, "have a very comfortable and petty bourgeoisie life here. We run our own business. We travel when and where we like. We can indulge in all sorts of intellectual and political pursuits in this open society or we can choose to hibernate. The choices are there ..."

He also has a car, lives in a four-roomed house in a select part of Oxford and a photograph of him in the front cover of a pamphlet he recently published shows him sitting on a park bench dressed like a successful City gentleman and complete with a business-like briefcase by his side.

All of which goes to show that you cannot keep a good Singaporean down and out for long even when he is on the run with a forged passport. It strikes me on the face of it that he is very much a privileged illegal immigrant, because genuine illegal immigrants get pretty rough treatment in the United Kingdom.

Anyway now that the recent low-grade attempt at subversion has been disrupted, it is my belief that Tan Wah Piow would be allowed to retire to a well-earned and prosperous obscurity.

This does not mean that the Marxist threat has been ended forever in Singapore. That would be to underestimate the recuperative powers of this hydra-headed monster. You

lop off one head and another and different head sprouts as replacement. It is my contention that a new type of Marxist-Communism, more sophisticated and which has learnt from its fatal errors the past forty years, is now taking shape. We have long equated Communism with the kind of people who formed the congregation, as it were, of the old Malayan Communist Party. Its leaders and followers were drawn principally from the underprivileged and dispossessed Chinese-educated class. They conspired in squalid cubicles and squatter huts. The young men and women then had understandable reasons to be angry with a society which condemned them forever to a life of humiliation and deprivation. Their intellectual fare and orientation then was the disastrous fantasies of a Mao whose principal object was to single-mindedly devote his life to building the myth of a heroic Super-Mao than to building a thriving modern China. Deng Hsiao-Ping has no easy time freeing the Chinese people from the paralysing spell Mao cast over them.

The conditions that bred Communists have largely disappeared from Singapore and with it the attractions of the old Communism.

In fact, the old Communism is in disrepute in most parts of the world because its performance in the contiguous land mass stretching from East Berlin through China to Vietnam is irrefutable proof that the road to Communism is the road to a proletarian Hell than to a proletarian Heaven.

So then, you may well ask, where is the Communist threat? Are we not, as some of our critics claim, dangling a Communist bogey in Singapore merely to perpetuate indefinitely PAP rule? Is it not possible that we detained not subversive Marxists but honest critics of the PAP? After all, they were well-educated and well-placed men and women in an affluent society. So they cannot be Communists.

It is a measure of the skill and sophistication of the new Marxists that they are able to get the wolf accepted by the sheep as a vegetarian animal just like them. This is superb Marxist magic. I think it is going to take a long time to break its spell.

In Liberation Theology, we have to contend, not with the wretched of the earth, but with professors of theology, priests, bishops and may be a few as yet undetected archbishops and cardinals. There are many non-Communist and even anti-Communist Congressmen and Western Parliamentarians and human rights buffs who are ready to throw a protective ring around the disguised Marxists in the sincere belief that they are really rosary counting servants of God or if they tote AK-AK guns, then soldiers of Christ.

That is why I think that the Marxist plot we busted in May this year is the first of many that will be launched not only against Singapore but also against every other East and South-East Asian country where earlier attempts by Communists to seize power had been thwarted. Vocal and financial support for the new Marxists will come, this time, not from Peking or Moscow, but from the capitals of the Western world, including Australia and New Zealand where the Liberation Theologians have only to raise the battle cry of "Human Rights" to bring quivering and speechless non-Communists submissively to their knees.

Am I exaggerating the resurgence of a new Marxism in our region?

At the moment, the Government of Corazon Aquino, only recently returned by a massive popular vote, is confronting a serious and growing insurgency led by the Communist National People's Army. The NPA's death squad regularly augment their insurgency by assassination of

policemen and other unco-operative government officials. Recently, an attempt was made on the life of Cardinal Sin because of his anti-Communist stand.

But what is most alarming is the moral and material support the NPA is receiving from Liberation Theologians in the Philippines as well as from the United States. Bishops, priests and nuns from both these countries have petitioned President Reagan not to provide the Aquino Government with arms to counter Communist insurgency. The Washington Post, late last year, carried a report of "an open letter of concern" signed by 50 American missionaries in the Philippines and sent to 1,000 churches in the US claiming that the Communist insurgency was a true liberationist movement. The paper also said that funds were raised in the US and sent to some 90 human rights organisations in the Philippines, some of them Church affiliated, and all of them Communist fronts.

In June of this year, a six-member delegation of Americans which included Mr Ramsey Clark, a former Attorney-General under Carter, and Mr Ralph McGehee, a former CIA agent, visited the Philippines and found the Aquino Government guilty of human rights violations and condemned vigilante counter attacks on Communists as unwarranted interference by the US Government.

So what kind of theology is it that appears to have cemented a united front between God and St Marx? Who fathered this remarkable theology and for what ends?

The authors of Liberation Theology are Communists who have grown wiser and more quick-witted over the years aided and abetted by confused non-Communists. I would therefore like to clear the ground by referring you to an observation made in the thirties by a now dead secretary-general of the now defunct Communist International. He said



then that it would be necessary for success to reinforce the Communist vanguard by a still larger expendable army of what he called "useful idiots".

The new Marxists are doing pretty well in the matter of recruiting expendable useful idiots in Western democracies.

The theology of the new Marxism is, to put it simply, Marxism articulated in theological language.

Here, for example, is a theological gem from Ernesto Cardenal, the Nicaraguan priest who is also a poet and currently Minister for Culture in the Sandinista Government. Says he: "Christ led me to Marx. For me the four Gospels are equally Communist".

Cardenal was the man at whom Pope John Paul II wagged an admonishing finger at Managua Airport in 1983.

Later, Cardenal told reporters: "I don't think His Holiness understands Marxism". This of a Pope who had spent almost all his life in a full-fledged Marxist state.

In fact, Liberation Theology is more Leninist and Maoist than Marxist. Neither Lenin nor Mao were really interested or paid much attention to Marx's hard to follow dialectical materialism and his prophetic denunciations. As a matter of fact, Marxism as an economic and political guide was never taken seriously either by Lenin or by Mao, both of whom were more interested in the practice rather than the theory of politics. Marxism has always been for Communist parties an agitational tool rather than holy doctrine to be strictly obeyed. The Communists used Marxism because of its anti-capitalist and class warfare concepts - useful ideas for the mobilisation of unsophisticated masses and the fueling of the revolution.

Today, successful Communists are quietly burying Marxism because they now realize that Marx's political, economic and sociological superstitions are millstones round their necks and most likely to bury Communist states rather than the thriving capitalist nations they had hoped to bury.

However, the failure of Marx's central ideas has not diminished the mass appeal of Marxism even today. It is still a useful tool for struggling Communist parties. The reason is that the appeal of Marxism is almost entirely due to its prophetic, mythological and irrational elements. It is a doctrine of blind confidence that there is a paradise on earth round the corner, provided you know how to find the right corner. Marx's errors have, in no way, weakened the spiritual certainty Marx offers the ignorant and bewildered faithful. It still has the force of a chiliastic religion. Whereas the Christian theologian can only offer one Paradise in the other world, the Liberation Theologian offers two paradises - one up there and the other an instant Paradise down here - for the price of one genuflection. Marxism has always radiated a religious aurora which explains the fascination Liberation Theology has for simple-minded priests and nuns.

It is my contention that by focussing attention on the irrelevant Marxist content of Communism we become easy victims for Communist sleight of hand. We are less likely to be confused if we perceive Communism as hundred percent Leninism and Maoism. Both Leninism and Maoism are two sides of the same coin and so when I refer to Leninism it embraces Maoism as well.

So what is Leninism? It is not philosophy. It is not idealism. It is simply a political machine for seizing, retaining and maximising power for its own sake. Practice is adapted, not to Marxist theory, but to actual historical realities and to the insatiable hunger of a small band of

Communist leaders for total power. Communist leaders are both pragmatic and dogmatic. Lenin called adaptation of sacred ideology to changing realities "tactics" and a formidable literature on tactics was developed by him and his successors to guide the actual operations of Leninist parties. This literature of tactics, which most Marxists are unaware of, constitutes the most impressive guide to the capture of political power in a wide range of contexts. It is realistic, pragmatic, ruthless, cynical and totally amoral. Its analysis and prescriptions are ideologically neutral. The tactics they recommend can be used with equal success to further any ideology - Marxism, Fascism, Nazism, Castroism, Peronism, Ho Chiminism, People's imperialism and any other "ism" engaged in the uninhibited pursuit of state power. Though Leninism dutifully prostrates itself before holy Marxism, it deviates from orthodoxy when necessary in the name of "tactical flexibility".

In the name of tactical flexibility "socialism" is imposed, contrary to Marxism, on pre-feudal societies. Communist parties claim to be the "vanguard of the proletariat" in countries where no proletariat exists. Military occupation, subversion and coups d'etat are substitutes for popular revolutions and a tiny elite of intellectual Al Capones are substituted for the working class.

The Liberation Theologians are, in my view, Leninists wearing white collars the wrong way round. To take but one example: On the question of truth and morality the Liberation Theologians are totally on the side of Lenin than of the Gospels.

In 1920, in his pamphlet "Left Communism", Lenin set out his concept of morality. In the interests of the revolution, he said: "We must agree to any sacrifice, and even - if need be - to resort to all sorts of stratagems, artifices, illegal methods, to evasions and subterfuges ... to carry on Communist work at all costs".

Shocking it certainly is but is it more shocking than this from Father Juan Segundo's book, "A Theology for Artisans of a New Humanity". This is how he perceives truth:

"The only truth is the truth that is efficacious for man's liberation".

Pastor Miguel Bonino, a Protestant Liberation Theologian argues that:

"There is no truth outside or beyond the historical events in which men take part. There is, therefore, no knowledge except in action itself".

The official position of the Vatican on Leninist Liberation Theology was stated in no uncertain terms by Cardinal Ratzinger when he accused it of promoting revolution by any means

"including, if necessary, violence, homicide, mendacity ... It is clear that the concept of truth itself is in question here and it is totally subverted ... For the Marxist the truth is a truth of class. There is no truth but the struggle of the revolutionary class".

This then is the measure of the threat posed by the new Leninist-Marxism operating under cover of a spurious Liberation Theology. This is no bogey. It is high-tech Leninist-Communism.

What makes it far more dangerous than the old Communism is that the new Leninist-Marxism is really a Revolution of Nihilism. It has no cause, no faith; not even a misguided but firmly held set of ideals. The Leninists

have joined forces with nihilist theologians only for one purpose - to destroy capitalism knowing full well that they cannot erect in its place a Heaven on Earth.

These are the Genghis Khans of the 21st century and they are no bogies.

For all I know Liberation Theology could spawn a new religion. I base this on an interview Fidel Castro gave to the admiring Brazilian Liberation Theologian, Frei Betto, about a year ago.

Castro who has probably never entered a Church since his baptism says: "I believe that Karl Marx could have subscribed to the Sermon on the Mount". He then draws parallels between the martyrdom of early Christians and the new and growing pantheon of Communist martyrs. He tells Betto of a martyrdom he witnessed during the Bay of Pigs invasion. He recites how a wounded soldier, even as life flowed out of him, dipped his finger in his own blood and painted Castro's name on the door. Comments Brother Castro:

"That part of the door has been preserved.  
I tell you it was a very impressive thing!"

This is the stuff out of which religions are made and Castro's story hints at his possible deification.