

Malaysia: PSM Pays Tribute To Tan Jing Quee (1939-2011)

Tuesday 28 June 2011, by [ARUTCHELVAN S.](#), [TAN Jing Quee](#) (Date first published: 18 June 2011).

We never knew the younger Jing Quee. The Jing Quee who was the editor of *Fajar* – the University Socialist Club Organ, nor the Jing Quee, the trade unionist of SATU (Singapore Association of Trade Union), nor the Jing Quee who was a Barisan Socialist candidate or Jing Quee, the political prisoner and detainee.

We knew the older Jing Quee and even that was only made possible because it was him who reached out to us and said, “We will have to support you, because you are still fighting for socialism”. We in PSM came across Jing Quee only 6 years ago– it was in 2005, September 9th till 11th., when PSM organized its first International Conference called Socialism 2005. It was a huge success and many people we knew and did not know came along. One such couple was Jing Quee and Rose. I spotted Jing Quee when he looked so passionate and brimming with pride when the Internationale was sung at the Conference. I thought he might be an old retired comrade.

During one of the sessions, when two of the International guest was debating on who is the more left or purist among them, Jing Quee stood up and critiqued them as hairsplitting views and said there are more important things that the left must look at. “Let’s not waste our time with your hairsplitting definitions!” He got a big applause from the rest and for putting things back on track. Jing Quee as we observed is most of the time quiet but when he is not happy, he stands up and makes his points. It was in another debate in 2008, while a foreign speaker was branding the MCP as misled Maoist did Jing Quee came to their defense. He was annoyed with people labeling names without understanding the circumstances. In the same conference, he came to the defense of the newly elected Maoist Party in Nepal. He said let’s give them a chance as we don’t seem to know what are their actual situation.

Since 2005, Jing Quee and Rose was always present in our Socialism functions. Jing Quee said he felt at home because there are still people out there talking about socialism. He called this his annual pilgrimage. It was then that we slowly got to know the man and his history. He was always humble and always prepared to discuss and listen. Unlike many people in his generations who have retired, Jing Quee kept going on, always inspiring us that PSM is doing the right things, listening as well as cautioning us.

His memory and recollections were fantastic and along with Poh Soo Kai and Kay Yew – among the people we got to know through him – they would relate us the stories of the past with such precision as if it just happened yesterday. Jing Quee was in fact the bridge linking us with his generations and their struggle. He kept telling us that the story of Singapore and Malaysia is one nation, one history and one struggle.

For PSM – a young party trying to fight it out in the post cold war era in a sea of capitalism. Jing Quee was an inspiration and he always took the trouble to meet up with us, encourage us and kept telling us that the part of socialism is the right path. Never once – did he ever surrender his ideological positions or his ideals. He always spoke about the future with hope. He and Rose together – make a formidable team. They always had this youthfulness in them and always full of

energy and fire.

When we heard and learned of his prostate cancer and when I visited him with some comrades, Jing Quee still had his sense of humor but he was starting to look quite ill. Last year December, when I visited him, it struck me that Jing Quee is really ill. I left his home then with the feeling, that maybe... it will be the last time, I will see him again.

Then again, Jing Quee against all odds appeared in Chinese Assembly hall last month in May to launch the book *The May 13 generation and the Mighty Wave*. While being partially paralyzed and have lost his sight, Jing Quee did speak in the launch, responded to Q and A. His points were sharp and he made sense all along. It was a tremendous feat of will power and a testament on what the man is made off.

On Tuesday, I received a rare email from Rose. It read that Jing Quee has passed away. Visiting him to pay our last respect yesterday, it struck me that though we may only have known him for 6 years; it seems as if I have lost a very old comrade. It seems as if we have known him for such a long time.

Jing Quee in the short 6 years we have known him, has been a great mentor and an inspiration to people like us. Jing Quee always talked about being practical, about being ideological and the importance of doing work. There was this thing about him – his witty comments, his tough statements, his laughter and his humbleness. His willingness to share and listen and his principles which is not to be compromised. Jing Quee has left a lasting impression on us.

Rose – his partner for life and comrade in arms is a great women with a big heart. Even yesterday, she was full of life – trying to keep everyone happy and telling us on how we should preserve history and help the older comrades.

PSM pays tribute to Tan Jing Quee. His contribution will go a long way and inspire the younger generations to come. Our heartfelt condolences to his family, his friends and to our comrade Rose. The Fajar Generation has continued to give us the dawn we always needed. We will fight onfor a better world and a better society....

The last paragraph of *ISA Detainee*, a poem by Jing Quee:

*What then is the truth ?
A generation trapped in lies
Who rushed to defend, to justify
Never to listen, see or speak out.
Only when we open our hearts
Confront this barbarism
Can we truly exorcise our fears,
Finally emerge as a free people,
A liberated society.*

Farewell, comrade.

S. Arutchelvan,

PSM Secretary General. 18 June 2011, 1am.

What was it like 'inside'? - Former ISA detainee Tan Jing Quee (1939-2011)

Posted by theonlinecitizen on June 16, 2011 50

Former ISA detainee Tan Jing Quee passed away from cancer on 14 June 2011.

Mr Tan was arrested in 1963 under the Internal Security Act (ISA) for alleged pro-communist activities, and released in 1966. He was arrested again and detained for about three months in February 1977 under the ISA for allegedly joining a group to revive pro-communist activities here. Mr Tan always maintained he was not involved in Communist United Front activities.

He was most recently a contributor and editor of *The May 13 Generation*, a book of essays on the Chinese middle school student movement in the 1950s.

The following is a poem by Mr Tan about his time in detention.

What was it like 'inside'?

A difficult question

Could you, would you really listen

Without sneer, to the end

How should I begin?

Should I start from the traumas of the raid

How liberty was so capriciously enchained

Without a warrant, without warning

On the dark hours

When even dogs slept undisturbed.

You were hauled into a world ran amok:

The mug shots, 'turn out your pockets'

the thumb and fingers impressions

(Whatever for, I commit no crime!).

No one bothered,

The guard shoved you on,

Along the corridor of despair;

That first heavy thud of the iron door

Sealing you incommunicado from the world –

The wind, sun, moon, and the stars

And all that was human and dear

Should I recall the dark cell

At Central Police Station[1]

A purgatory of perpetual night

The stone slab for the bed

Sullied, soiled mattress, no sheets

The pillow of tears and stains, no cover

Blood smeared walls, cries of past agonies

The rude, cruel hourly rip-rap of the shutters

“To check your health”,

So it was explained.

Should I narrate

The daily bath at the tap

The squat pan, dank and putrid

Meant to dehumanize, humiliate

Should we be thankful

For the daily ditch water

Which passed for tea

The stony crumbs for bread

The rice so callously tossed with dust

Should we be grateful

For the censored books and news,

To decontaminate our minds;

Should we be grateful too

For the unbearable heat

The lonely insomnia of the day and night,

Migraine and diarrhoeic fever
And panadol as panacea?
How could I ever forget those Neanderthals
Who roamed Whitley Holding Centre, [2]
Under cover of darkness,
Poured buckets of ice water
Over my stripped, shivering nakedness,
Slugged my struggling, painful agony
Circling , sneering, snarling
Over my freezing nudity,
More animals than men:
What induced this
Vengeful venom, violent score
To settle, not for a private grievance
But a public, democratic dissidence;
From whence sprang this barbarity?
What made men turn into beasts
In the dark, away from prying eyes,
Protected by a code of dishonour and lies
To ensure they survive and rise.
For sure, there were gentler souls
Who tried to be decent, no more:
The smiling guard who lightened the hours
With a chance remark, a joke
The barber who brought his scissors, cigarettes and news
The interrogator who handed a bible
Told him the elegant prose
Contrasted strangely with my current state,

How distant those beautiful thoughts were

From the violence to our liberty.

What then is the truth ?

A generation trapped in lies

Who rushed to defend, to justify

Never to listen, see or speak out.

Only when we open our hearts

Confront this barbarism

Can we truly exorcise our fears,

Finally emerge as a free people,

A liberated society.

[1] Formerly at South Bridge Road, now demolished, which had several cells frequently used for interrogation of police prisoners, from a month to a year, before they were dispatched to normal prison conditions at Changi Prison.

[2] A relatively new detention center built in the 1970s located off Whitley Road, used to hold political prisoners for short and medium term, mainly for interrogation .

The poem is published in *Our Thoughts Are Free: Poems and Prose on Imprisonment and Exile*, edited by Tan Jing Quee Teo Soh Lung Koh Kay Yew Ethos Books Singapore
