

The Betty Letters

My Dear Grandchild,

You really have to admire the Government of Singapore for the way in which it prevents ugly incidents from germinating to maturity – by creating its own legal, Singapore-styled ugly incidents. The modus operandi of the police forces of this autocratic, authoritarian government (the Island Republic has more than one kind of police force, by the way) is akin to what firefighters, the world over, employ: Fight fire with backfire. Of late, the Singapore police and other Singapore authorities have been gathering up all of the potential trouble-making tourists and visiting activists and tossing them out of the country on one pretext or another. Recently, a couple of would-be activists from Hongkong visited Singapore with the intention of staging a semi-nude protest outside a Kentucky Fried Chicken outlet in order to bring to the attention of the world the way in which this restaurant chain kills its chickens. The activists, who have formed themselves into a body, called, 'The People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals', make the claim that about 850 million chickens are killed, annually, by agents for Kentucky Fried Chicken by scalding them to death in defeathering tanks. It seems, according to reports, that, while drinking coffee in a small Singapore cafe, in rushed some members of the Singapore police and rounded them up in a jiffy. The duo was questioned for 9 hours – even though, at the time of the arrest and subsequent detention, they had committed no crime on the Singapore Statute Books. Now, you may wonder, at this point of my story, how the Singapore police knew of the whereabouts of the duo. It seems that the members of this organisation had been talking over their mobile telephones and, as is the wont of the Government of Singapore, telephone calls are monitored on a selective and regular basis. The Singapore police authorities do not have to obtain a Magistrate's warrant for such an action if there is deemed to be a reasonable belief that a crime may be about to take place. Tracking down the would-be activists, as they used their mobile telephones, was the relatively easy task of simple triangulation. This form of tracking down people was perfected during World War II by the Gestapo, the elite branch of Hitler's special disciplinary forces, as opposed to the regular German Army. Triangulation of radio messages was used by the Government of Adolf Hitler, especially, in order to locate spies, sending messages in Morse Code or other coded forms from within the captured countries and from Germany, itself. Really, on reflection, there is a striking similarity between the way in which the Singapore Government has organised itself and monitors its civilian population and incoming tourists and the way in which Germany, between 1939 and 1945, monitored its population as well as the movements of any and all would-be activists.

Even the President of the World Bank, Mr Paul Wolfowitz, criticised the Singapore Government, recently, labelling it as being 'authoritarian'. Mr Paul Wolfowitz was commenting on the fact that the Singapore Government had clamped down on the entry of activists to attend the World Bank Meeting and the International Monetary Fund Meeting. He said, among other things:

'Enormous damage has been done and a lot of that damage is done to Singapore and self-inflicted ... This could have been an opportunity for them (the Singapore Government) to showcase to the world their development process ... I would argue whether it has to be as authoritarian as it has been and I would argue that at the stage of success, they (the Government of Singapore) have reached, they would do much better for themselves with a more visionary approach to the process ...'.

Mr Paul Wolfowitz, whose English grammar leaves a lot to be desired, also, stated that the Singapore

Government had violated the understanding that the World Bank had with the Republic with regards to the matter of vocal activists, voicing their opinions about this and that. I recall that, recently, our Chief Executive, Mr Donald Tsang Yam Kuen, had a chat with Prime Minister of Singapore, Mr Lee Hsien Loong, along with his father, the Founder of modern Singapore, who still cracks the political whip, Mr Lee Kuan Yew. I suppose Mr Donald Tsang Yam Kuen was getting some advice on how to administer Hongkong à la Singapore style. In some of his public speeches since he returned from Singapore, there have been not-so-veiled threats against select Hongkong transportation companies should they not comply with his 'suggestions' on how to improve their services for the benefit of all of the people of the territory. (I wonder when Mr Donald Tsang Yam Kuen last rode in a public bus) Unlike Singapore, it is not easy to change the laws of Hongkong, overnight, as it is in Republic of the Lees. At least, that would appear to be the case at this juncture. The only aspect of leadership that I have noted about Mr Donald Tsang Yam Kuen is that he has become much more dictatorial since assuming the mantle of office. It seems that as soon as he donned the purple, he started, to coin a phrase, 'laying down the law', either directly or indirectly. What may be considered frightening, however, is that Mr Donald Tsang Yam Kuen may, in due course, consider trying to influence the Judiciary, obliquely. In the United States of America, Justices of the Supreme Court are appointed by the Executive, you know. In other words, they are political appointees. I hope and pray that such a system is not introduced in Hongkong because, if it should be introduced, then, the Chief Executive – the Executive Branch of Government – would, de facto, be able to control The Judiciary. 'Horror of horrors!' you may well exclaim. Then, again, Adolf Hitler influenced his Judiciary very effectively, didn't he? And, for a while, it appeared that the Germany of World War II had a (fighting) chance of being dictator of the world. As for Singapore, I don't know whether the Lees influence the Judiciary of Singapore because that might be going a little too far, but it is fact that the Lees have never lost a case of libel. And I don't recall a single case of anybody, complaining publicly about the Singapore Government, without, eventually, having to suffer in some shape or form. Even members of the opposition parties are loath, publicly, to make statements that are derogatory of the Singapore Government or of any of the senior members of that government.

Do you think that such a situation could be in our future, My Dear Grandchild? If so, I think that I would be better off in Shanghai, the home of my ancestors, where is it known that money talks and bullshit walks.

Talk to you next week.

Chief Lady

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