

## 'Lee Kuan Yew is Finally Dead!' blogger prosecuted

**Julian Simmons examines a Singaporean's expletive-laden video on the recently deceased leader and his conviction for wounding religious feelings.**



The prosecution of a Singaporean teenager for insulting the late Lee Kuan Yew highlighted the city-state's battered and under-discussed record of censorship. Singapore's founding prime minister, Lee Kuan Yew, died on 23 March 2015. Four days later a 16-year old video blogger named Amos Yee uploaded an expletive-laden video containing sexually crude metaphors to YouTube, a version

of which is available [here](#), which caused uproar in the country.

The 8-minute clip entitled “Lee Kuan Yew is Finally Dead!” raised several criticisms of Lee’s rule over Singapore, including high poverty, income inequality and the lack of civil liberties. Yee called Lee a “horrible person” and an “awful leader”, comparing him to Stalin, Hitler and above all, Jesus: “They are both power hungry, malicious and deceive others into thinking that they are compassionate and kind.” Yee dismissed Lee’s followers as “completely delusional and ignorant” with “absolutely no sound logic or knowledge about him that is grounded in reality, which Lee Yuan Yew very easily manipulates, similar to the Christians’ knowledge of the Bible and the words of a multitude of priests.”

Yee also challenged Lee’s son, Lee Hsien Loong, the current prime minister, to sue him, in which case he would “oblige to dance with him”. In addition, Yee uploaded a caricature to his blog showing Lee apparently having sex with Margaret Thatcher, the deceased former British prime minister.

Both the video and the image were met with overwhelmingly negative responses from Singaporeans. Some internet users made violent remarks, even threats of rape, against Yee. Yee himself was arrested on 29 March 2015 and charged with three offences. The first two alleged that the video violated Article 298 of the Penal Code: “[u]ttering words, etc., with deliberate intent to wound the religious or racial feelings of any person” and Article 4 (1a) of the Protection from Harassment Act 2014, in its “use [of] any threatening, abusive or insulting words or behaviour”. The third charge was that the image of Lee and Thatcher violated Article 292 (1a) of the Penal Code: the distribution of “any obscene book, pamphlet, paper, drawing, painting, representation or figure or any other obscene object whatsoever.”

During court hearings, Yee explained that the video was meant to promote open discussion on Christianity and Singapore to enable “positive change to take place in [the] future.” Any “ill-will” it caused would therefore be a “natural consequence” of this. Yee’s lawyers also challenged the obscenity charge, arguing that the law was aimed at “peddlers and purveyors of pornography”, while the image was clearly “not a pornographic image designed to arouse.”

On 12 May 2015 the court found Yee guilty of the first and third charges. The judge said that the image needed the “strongest possible disapproval and condemnation” and that Yee’s remarks on Jesus and Christianity were “clearly derogatory and offensive to Christians.” The second charge for insulting Lee Kuan Yew was dropped, pending a possible trial in the future.

Yee’s trial drew widespread criticism. The United Nations Human Rights Office for South-East Asia called for his immediate release, stating that “the criminal sanctions considered in this case seem disproportionate and inappropriate in terms of the international protections for freedom of expression and opinion.” Human Rights Watch noted that “[n]othing that Amos Yee said or posted should ever be considered criminal – much less merit incarceration.” Protests in support of Yee

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were held in Singapore, Hong Kong and Taiwan.

On 6 July 2015, Yee was given a four-week prison sentence but released immediately as the sentence was backdated to 2 June 2015, when he was in remand. Yee subsequently filed an appeal against his conviction at the High Court.

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