

Reporters Without Borders

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Asia - Singapore

SLAPP in the face

Reporters Without Borders calls for support for blogger Roy Ngerng

17 July 2014

Press freedom organization says PM's libel suit is designed to silence whistle-blower and warn off others.

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Singaporean Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong, who brought a libel suit against the blogger **Roy Ngerng Yi Ling** in May, is now trying to rush the case through the courts to prevent a full examination of the evidence.

This is the first time a Singaporean prime minister [has taken legal proceedings against one of his own citizens](#). On the eve of the first hearing in the trial tomorrow, Reporters Without Borders calls for urgent action by all netizens to support Roy Ngerng (see below).

The suit arises from an article published on 15 May headlined "Where your CPF Money is going: Learning from the City Harvest Trial". There is a strong possibility that Ngerng will be denied a fair trial and thus the chance to prove that the allegations against him are baseless.

On July 11, the prime minister applied for a summary judgment, in order to wrap up the case quickly and determine the damages against Ngerng, without the evidence being heard in full.

This procedure is only possible if the judges do not have to decide the case in the belief that the accused has already admitted his guilt and is unable to present an effective defence against the allegation.

"The case brought by the prime minister against Roy Ngerng is nothing but a diversionary tactic and a deterrent," said Benjamin Ismail, the head of the Reporters Without Borders Asia-Pacific Desk.

"It is based on the fact that a blogger works alone and does not benefit, for example, from the support of the news organization he works for, and on the desire to divert public attention from the [scandal surrounding the Central Provident Fund](#), which he has written about. The disproportionate resources deployed by the prime minister shows he wants to issue a warning to all Singapore citizens who might publish any information that directly or indirectly challenges the government.

"We urge Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong purely and simply to withdraw his case."

Reporters Without Borders considers Ngerng to be the latest victim of a particular legal device known as a Strategic Lawsuit Against Public Participation (SLAPP). It is designed in the first place to deny the blogger the ability to publish or the chance to defend himself.

Secondly, it is intended to send a deterrent message to all those involved in news and information who might be tempted to publicize, or carry on with, his work.

Finally, it is intended to divert public attention from the revelations in Ngerng's article. It is a procedure designed ultimately not to win the case but to publicly exhaust the blogger psychologically, financially and physically.

Never-ending SLAPP

A letter to Ngerng from Prime Minister Lee's lawyer on 18 May accused him of "false and baseless allegation" and demanded deletion of the blog post, a public apology and payment of damages and Lee's legal costs.

The alarmed Ngerng responded by issuing a letter of apology recognizing that the allegations were "false and completely without foundation."

He told Reporters Without Borders why he and his lawyer decided to apologize. "we thought

that that was the easiest way out of the situation, knowing that if we had proceeded to fight, it would result in certain bankruptcy, which has happened.”

Reporters Without Borders subsequently learned that the apology was actually drafted by Lee’s lawyers and not by Ngerng, despite the repeated public references to Ngerng’s so called admission of guilt.

In a series of exchanges in the media and by letter, Lee [refused to withdraw his libel suit](#) and said Ngerng’s apology was not “genuine.” His lawyers also demanded the deletion of some of Ngerng’s subsequent blog posts, threatening to increase the amount of damages sought.

On 10 June, [Tan Tock Seng Hospital fired Ngerng from his position](#) as patient coordinator on the grounds of “conduct incompatible with the values and standards expected of employees.” After many online comments by members of the public in support of Ngerng, the [health ministry issued a statement endorsing his dismissal](#) and condemning his actions.

A few days later, [Lee’s press secretary, Chang Li Lin, wrote to *The Economist*](#) criticizing its story about the libel suit. The letter was widely criticized in online posts questioning the involvement of government officials in a private matter and, in a reference to the health ministry’s statement, voicing concern about the possibility that the government had intervened directly against Ngerng.

COMBAT CENSORSHIP AND SUPPORT ROY NGERNG!

You can thwart the Singaporean prime minister’s attempt to censor Roy Ngerng by using the [Streisand Effect](#). To this end, Reporters Without Borders urges Internet users to:

- ▶ Circulate, share or host Ngerng’s blog post, which is available here: <http://therealsingapore.com/content...>
- ▶ Circulate, share or host the blog supporting Roy Ngerng: <http://isupportroyngerng.wordpress....>
- ▶ Contribute to Wikipedia’s articles on Singapore’s Central Provident Fund <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Centr...> and on the prime minister https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lee_H... mentioning the case

Reporters Without Borders also urges Internet users to:

- ▶ Contribute to Ngerng’s legal defence fund <http://thehearttruths.com/2014/05/2...>
- ▶ Follow Ngerng’s blog <http://thehearttruths.com/> and YouTube channel <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCx...>
- ▶ Voice your support for Ngerng on his Facebook page, The Heart Truths <https://www.facebook.com/pages/I-wa...>
- ▶ on the prime minister’s Facebook page <https://www.facebook.com/leehsienloong>
- ▶ on Central Provident Fund contact page: <http://mycpf.cpf.gov.sg/cpf/contact...>

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