

Evangelists Found Guilty in First Seditious Trial

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A Christian couple has been found guilty of distributing seditious or objectionable material to three Muslims and being in possession of seditious publications.

The case of Ong Kian Cheong, a SingTel technical officer, and Dorothy Chan Hien Leng, a UBS associate director, marks the first time in the republic that a full trial under the Seditious Act has been heard.

In 2005, a man was jailed for a month for posting inflammatory and vicious remarks about Muslims and Malays on the internet. The following year, an accounts assistant received a stern warning for posting an offensive cartoon of Jesus Christ on his blog.

For many years, they had been involved in mass-mailing evangelistic tracts to members of the public. Three recipients of some of the booklets found them seditious or objectionable and lodged complaints.

All three, who received the two evangelistic tracts titled *The Little Bride* or *Who Is Allah?* in December last year, told the court they felt angry, insulted and offended and believed a Christian group had sent them.

Ong and Chan were arrested on January 30 last year. The couple was also found to be in possession of 439 copies of eleven seditious publications at their Maplewoods Condominium.

The trial revolved around whether the couple knew or had reason to believe the publications they mailed to the three plaintiffs were seditious.

The prosecution had alleged that they were fully aware of the offensive nature of the contents and distributed those offensive publications to members of different faiths in Singapore with no regard for their feelings or sensitivities, according to the Straits Times.

Ong and Chan, however, claimed they had not read nor known what the tracts in question contained. Moreover, they added, they did not have reason to believe that the eleven tracts were seditious since they were openly sold at the Tecman bookstore in Bras Basah Complex.

District judge Roy Neighbour rejected their defence because the two tracts received by the three plaintiffs had been "ordered regularly and in bulk for over two decades" since 1987. Underscoring that they are educated and intelligent people, the judge said they "would have known" that the publications "had a serious seditious tendency because the tracts are not only highly critical but denigrate Islam, the Roman Catholic Church and other religions", reported Today.

He also disbelieved Chan's claim that she had "randomly" sent them out "because in a multi-racial society like Singapore, a name can reveal a person's race and possibly religion."

"It is plain (they) were watering down their roles in the commission of the offences," said the judge.

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The case was adjourned until Thursday for mitigation and possible sentencing.

Under the Sedition Act, anything that has a tendency to promote feelings of ill-will and hostility between different races or classes of the population of Singapore is considered seditious.

For distributing a seditious publication, the couple can be fined up to \$5,000 and/or jailed for up to three years on each of two charges. They can also face a fine of up to \$5,000 and/or a jail term of up to one year on one charge of distributing an objectionable publication. For possession of seditious materials at their home, they can be fined up to \$2,000 and/or jailed for up to 18 months.

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