

If you met Lee Kuan Yew today,
would you shake his hand?

No.

**Cai Haoxiang
Jeremy Au Yong**

Sipping tea over the dining room table at his two-storey terrace house in East Coast Road, Dr Poh Soo Kai exudes an old-school gentility that belies his 17-year political incarceration and hardened socialist convictions.

As his wife Margaret urges the reporters to help themselves to freshly cut papaya and Penang pastries, the 77-year old gives a genial chuckle: "My life story! So where do you want to start?"

Looking at the soft-spoken balding man in his polo T-shirt, it is hard to imagine that he was once regarded as a threat to national security.

The former Barisan Sosialis leader was arrested in 1963 for alleged pro-communist activities. He was released at the end of 1972 and re-arrested in 1976, accused of plotting to revive communist united front activities.

After his release in 1982, he practised as a doctor for eight years before emigrating to Canada with his wife in 1990. He returned to Singapore for good two years ago.

Among his peers, Dr Poh is remembered as the student activist who co-wrote the anti-British editorial entitled "Aggression in Asia" in *Fajar*, the journal of the then-University of Malaya Socialist Club (USC), in May 1954. It led to his arrest together with seven other students for sedition.

• Today, Dr Poh joins a growing group of ageing former leftists who are stepping into the open to give their side of the Singapore story.

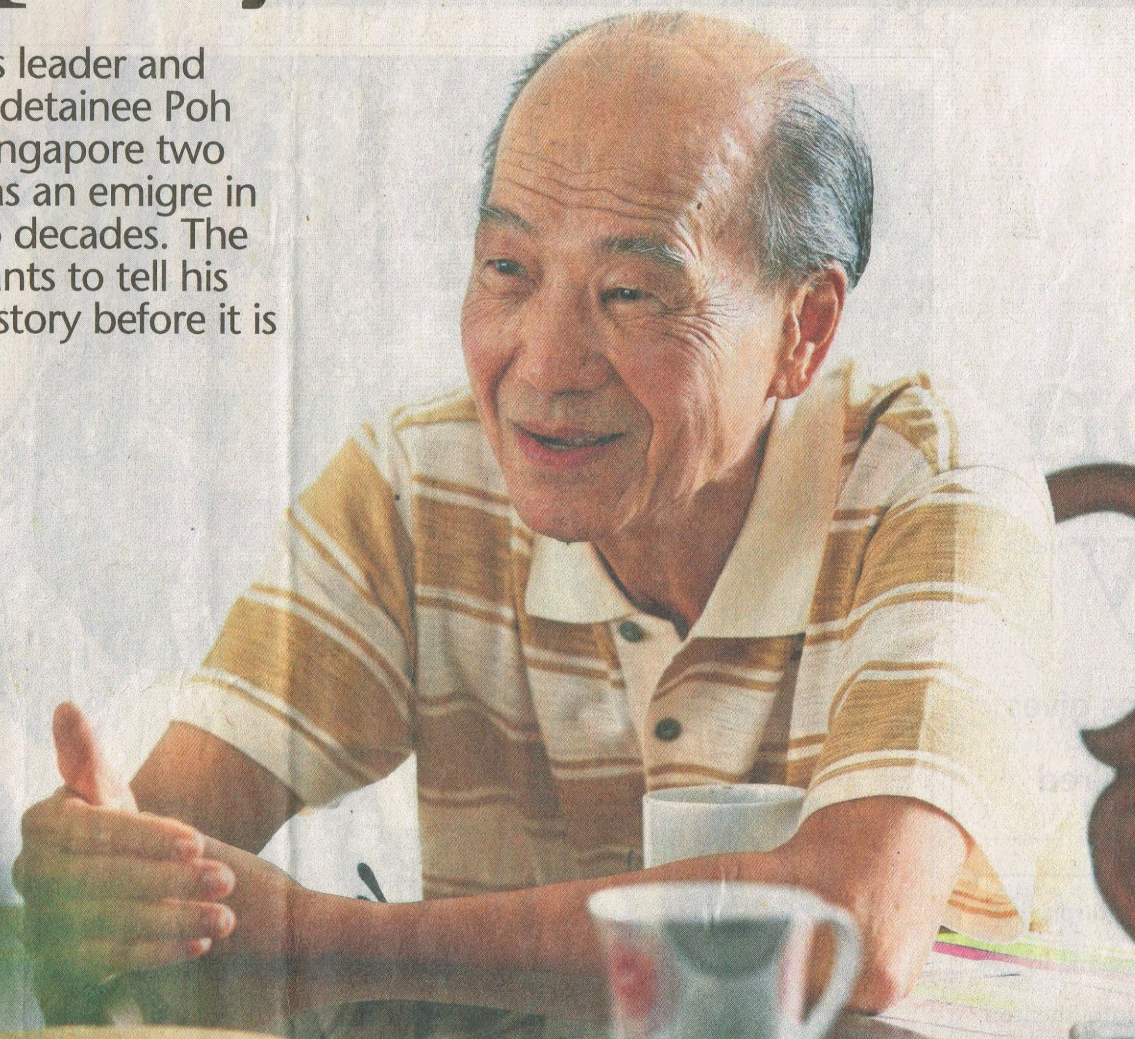
He is a key collaborator behind the book *The Fajar Generation: The University Socialist Club And The Politics Of Post-war Malaya And Singapore*, launched at the Alumni Medical Centre at Singapore General Hospital on Nov 15.

You wouldn't shake his hand?
Would you say anything to him?

Nothing more to say.

Dr Poh: Why I parted company with PAP

Former Barisan Sosialis leader and Operation Cold Store detainee Poh Soo Kai returned to Singapore two years ago after living as an emigre in Canada for nearly two decades. The 77-year-old doctor wants to tell his side of the Singapore story before it is too late.



ST PHOTO: ONG WEE JIN

In four articles, Dr Poh wrote about the founding of the club, the political circumstances surrounding his detention, and the future of socialism.

The first question that springs to mind: After living in Vancouver for 17 years as a rose-planting retiree, why did he return to Singapore in 2007?

His reply: I wanted to be with my family.

"My sister who lived in Canada has passed away. I'm getting old. The National Health Service there is very good but when you go to the hospital, nobody comes to see you."

All his surviving family members, who include two brothers and two sisters, are in Singapore.

Dr Poh was born in Singapore, the fourth child of six in a privileged Straits-born Chinese family.

His maternal grandfather was prominent millionaire businessman and philanthropist Tan Kah Kee, and his uncle was Mr Lee Kong Chian, another famous philanthropist and founder of OCBC Bank.

Just before the fall of Singapore to the Japanese, his family moved to India. He spent the four war years in a Catholic missionary secondary school in Mumbai.

He moved back to Singapore after the Japanese surrender and entered Raffles Institution, before going to the medical faculty of the University of Malaya, the predecessor of the National University of Singapore, in 1950.

His nascent socialist views can be traced to his coming of age years in a colonial society that was undergoing tremendous political ferment after the war.

On campus, he joined like-minded students in USC. Formed in 1953, it was a debating forum for students who were against colonialism and sought independence for Malaya and Singapore. They believed in freedoms of speech and assembly, and opposed detention without trial.

Its founding members included Dr Wang Gungwu, now an eminent China scholar, Mr James Puthuchear, Mr S. Woodhull, Mr Ong Pang Boon, Mr Chua Sian Chin, Mr Abdullah Majid and Dr Lim Hock Siew.

Dr Poh served as the club's first treasurer and second president, and chaired the editorial board of Fajar, which means "dawn" in Malay.

He and Dr M.K. Rajakumar co-wrote the May 1954 Fajar article which condemned Western imperialism and criticised the South-east Asia Treaty Organisation, a military pact formed by the Western powers to oppose communism in the region.

Enraged, the British authorities launched a dawn raid on the Bukit Timah campus and, arrested the writers and six students for sedition just before they were about to sit for their final examinations. The six were Professor Edwin Thumboo, Mr Puthuchear, Mr Kwa Boo Sun, Mr Lam Khuan Kit, Mr P. Arudsothy and Mr Thomas Varkey.

Their defence was led by Mr D.N. Pritt, a Queen's Counsel from England assisted by a junior lawyer, Mr Lee Kuan Yew. The charges were thrown out without the defence being called.

The case became a cause celebre, imprinting Mr Lee's name in the

public consciousness, helping him to garner widespread support among English- and Chinese-educated intellectuals and students.

As Dr Poh recollects, after the Fajar trial, Mr Lee would invite him to his house at 38 Oxley Road every fortnight to "drink beer and talk".

He notes that he was involved in the embryonic discussions that eventually led to the founding of the People's Action Party (PAP) three months later. "But Lee did most of the work, I just attended to give my views."

He says his relations with Mr Lee began to cool when he began to suspect that the PAP leader did not share the same ideological platform as the leftists.

Nevertheless, he remained an ordinary PAP member and was inactive in politics as he was tied down by his career.

In 1957, he had graduated from medical school. In 1959, when the PAP swept to power, he was in government service, training to be a doctor in surgery, obstetrics and gynaecology.

THE BIG SPLIT

In 1961, the political temperature was coming to the boil. The PAP was racked by challenges from its powerful leftist faction over the issues of merger with Malaya, Chinese education and the continuing detention of leftists.

After losing two by-elections, the party was on the brink of collapse. The beleaguered Mr Lee moved a motion of confidence in the 51-seat legislative assembly. The PAP survived when 27 voted

aye but 13 dissident assemblymen abstained.

The dissidents and other leftist members were expelled from the party. They formed a new party, Barisan Sosialis, led by Mr Lim Chin Siong as secretary-general and Dr Lee Siew Choh as chairman.

Dr Poh was roped in as assistant secretary-general. He remembers being in charge of discussions on party issues and ideology.

He says he had to give up a scholarship to pursue higher studies and a job in the government service to join Barisan. Why? "It was a duty to fight the PAP leadership's stand."

He felt the PAP leadership had betrayed its earlier position on freeing students and unionists locked up for participating in labour unrest.

Touching on The Big Split of 1961, which saw the leftists leaving the PAP to form Barisan Sosialis, Dr Poh insists: "We did not split from the PAP. That's a fact...none of the official views wanted to stress on that. We had a difference of opinion."

He referred to statements by six PAP unionists in the run-up to the 1961 Anson by-election, which came out openly against the ruling party.

The Big Six – Mr Lim, Mr Fong Swee Suan, Mr Woodhull, Mr Dominic Puthuchear, Mr S.T. Bani and Mr Jamit Singh – had stated that while they supported the PAP in the coming by-election, they would not compromise on issues such as detention without trial and freedoms of press, speech, assembly and organisation.

Dr Poh argues that these statements amounted to a "request", not an "ultimatum". But Mr Lee, he says, saw this as a challenge to the PAP leadership and decided to make the split.

OPERATION COLD STORE

Feb 2, 1963, was the day that changed Dr Poh's life forever.

As he wrote in The Fajar Generation about the pre-dawn arrests: "There were the fierce barking of the dogs, a swarm of fully armed Gurkha police, the Jeeps and the Land Rovers."

More than 100 leftists and unionists were arrested in a massive security exercise known as Operation Cold Store, aimed at putting communists and suspected communists behind bars.

As he recounts his years in detention, he draws a diagram of his prison on the back of an envelope.

The first period of detention involved months of solitary confinement, where he could sometimes hear prisoners shouting incoherently from their cells.

The strain detainees faced was more psychological than physical, he says, as they were interrogated about whether their friends were communists or involved in pro-communist activities.

Dr Poh admits he is a socialist, even a Marxist, but denies being a communist, that is, being a card-carrying member of the Malay-Communist Party.

In his recollection, detainees were asked to implicate their friends. He speaks about a man who had just come out of solitary confinement to live with detainees at the Moon Crescent Centre in

Changi. Day or night, the man would wear dark glasses.

Puzzled by his behaviour, Dr Poh approached him one evening and asked him why. "*Bo min kua lang* (no face to see people), the man replied in Hokkien. He feels bad, he feels that he's let down his friend."

Reflecting on the experience of detention, he says that every detainee is scarred to some extent but that traumatic memories will wear off gradually. Yet his words, delivered in perfectly enunciated English, betray an occasional trace of bitterness and frustration: "No regrets, but you are unhappy, you know. It's very obvious. I mean, you can't keep a person in prison and lock him up, you know, without a valid reason."

"You ask him (Lee) to bring you to court, he doesn't bring you to court. I mean, you feel they have to change the system. You can't have a system like this continue. You don't want your children, your grandchildren to live in a police state."

He would not shake Mr Lee's hand if he met him. "There's nothing more to say," he says.

THE ROAD NOT TAKEN

The long years in prison cost him his first marriage, and as a result he has no children. He had a divorce after he was freed in 1982.

Later, he set up his own clinic in Upper Serangoon and practised until 1990, when he decided to emigrate.

Asked why, he says he felt uneasy about his life then. Friends were afraid to see him, and there had been arrests three years earlier, made under the ISA, of 16 Singaporeans accused of involvement in a "Marxist conspiracy" to overthrow the Government.

An older sister, who was living in Canada, asked him to join her. In 1990, Dr Poh emigrated with Margaret, but would return regularly to meet old friends.

While in Canada, he started to prepare material for a book. He often visited the British archives in London to ferret for information.

The Fajar Generation, which had been in the making for 10 years, he says, is meant to honour the memory of many of his fellow activists who died.

"I particularly feel I owe a duty to all my friends who have gone... I owe a duty to all of them to describe the conditions, the struggle, the difficulties we had because we were all together in the struggle."

Such an account was timely, he notes, as the younger generation had shown a growing interest in alternative accounts of Singapore's history.

Many young people, he adds, did not know what their parents went through during the 1950s and 1960s.

"It's about time the younger generation in Singapore knew the struggle, the different views and political forces pulling this way and that."

To this day, Dr Poh still holds strongly to his socialist ideals. His eyes light up when he waxes eloquent about how the profit motive should not be as important as that of the welfare of the people.

Now that he is back observing Singapore's development, what does he think of its future?

He gives a bleak assessment, arguing that Singapore is too dependent on an export-oriented economy.

In his view, if there was no Operation Cold Store, Barisan would have won the 1963 election "hands down". Then, he says, Singapore might have been less dependent on foreign direct investment, and there might have been more freedom and discussion about the country's development.

But he is through with politics. He laughs when asked if he intends to work for a political party: "No, no, no. We are too old for that."

"I wish to do nothing," he laughs again, saying he intends to spend his days looking around and talking to people.

Looking back on his life, Dr Poh says he has no regrets. There is no point thinking about what his life might have been. "You must see all these decisions were taken consciously. I try and see as far ahead as I can, right?"

Referring to The Road Not Taken by American poet Robert Frost, he says: "You take this road, you're not sure where it leads but once you take it, another road comes in, another junction comes in. So you really do not know because you've not taken that road."

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SMA FOUNDING MEMBER, BUT DOCS DON'T KNOW HIM

When Dr Poh Soo Kai stepped into the office of the Singapore Medical Association (SMA) at Singapore General Hospital's Outram compound, a staff member asked him who he was.

He pointed to a plaque on the conference room wall which read: Honorary Secretary, Poh Soo Kai, 1959-1961.

Realising that Dr Poh was a founding member, the staff member said he was exempted from having to pay the association's annual subscription fee of \$200.

He would also be entitled to free copies of its medical journal, newsletters, lifestyle magazines and other publications. SMA represents more than 5,000 doctors.

Earlier, he was having lunch with eminent eye surgeon Arthur Lim, who is a sibling of his brother's wife, when the latter mentioned he had just learnt that Dr Poh was a founding member of SMA. Professor Lim then took him to the office to see the plaque.

Dr Poh relates this encounter, which took place just after his return from Canada in

2007, to explain how his 17-year political detention had cut him off from the medical world.

Such was the disconnect with the people in his professional field, he says, that when he returned to SMA which he helped found, he did not know anyone.

As he recalls, SMA was formed largely by Dr B.R. Sreenivasan, its first president, who later became vice-chancellor of the then-University of Singapore.

"My role? He pulled me in as secretary," says Dr Poh.

One detrimental effect of long detention, Dr Poh points out, was that it prevented him from keeping in touch with developments in the outside world, and made it difficult for him to keep up with his medical knowledge.

He recounts how he struggled to find his feet as a doctor for the first few years after his release. For example, he would hold instruments for his brother-in-law, who was practising as a surgeon, just so he could get used to handling blood.

2年前从加拿大回国

傅树楷医生

不愿见 李资政

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身为人民行动党历史的重要见证人，傅树楷医生回国却不愿再见内阁资政李光耀，还表示跟李资政没有什么好聊的。

《海峡时报星期天》今天刊登前社会主义阵线（社阵）领导人傅树楷医生的专访。

傅医生在1950年进入马来亚大学（新加坡国立大学前身）修读医科，之后和医学院朋友成立社会主义俱乐部，并先后担任财政和主席。

他同时也是俱乐部刊物《华惹》（Fajar）的编辑部主席。

傅医生和拉惹古玛医生（M.K. Rajakumar）于1954年5月的刊物，撰写了谴责西方帝国主义，并批评东南亚条约组织的文章。

东南亚条约组织是冷战时期，美国在亚太地区建立的军事集团，目的是组成区域性的反共产主义联盟。

李光耀为他辩护 两人成为好朋友

这个编辑部在同月被新加坡的英国政府辑拿，并控以煽动罪，但编辑部聘请英国皇家大律师辩护，最后获得无罪释放。当时协助大律师的是现任内阁资政李光耀。

随后，李资政常邀傅医生到欧思礼路的住家“喝酒聊天”，而傅医生还参与了人民行动党初步形成的重要会议。

傅医生透露，他和李资政的关系随后却渐渐冷淡，因为他开始怀疑，行动党领袖和左派人士

的思维并不相同。

1961年，左派人士退出行动党，自组了社阵，傅医生担任社阵的助理秘书长，辅佐秘书长林清祥和党主席李绍祖医生。

傅医生为加入社阵，放弃了奖学金和在政府机构的工作，但他认为，对抗行动党是“职务”，因为行动党领导已背叛最初的立场，也就是要解救那些因参与劳资纠纷而被囚禁的学生和工会会员。

谈退出行动党



▲傅树楷医生回国，却不愿再见资政李光耀。（海峡时报星期天）

‘我们不是分裂 只是意见不合’

谈到行动党分家，傅医生坦言：“我们不是分裂，我们只是意见不合。”

1963年2月2日，傅医生和百多名反对党人士，在李资政的冷藏行动下，以涉嫌参与共产主义活动为由遭逮捕。

1972年末，傅医生获得无条件释放，4年后再以“企图复兴共产主义”为由被捕，直到1982年8月才释放。

傅医生之后行医8年，在1990年和妻子移民加拿大，两年后为和其他兄弟姐妹团聚，回国居住。

谈起被拘留的经历，傅医生说：“没有遗憾，但会不满。这是很理所当然的，你不能不给理由地囚禁一个人。”

随后，傅医生表示，如果现在遇到李资政，他不会想和李资政握手。

“那有没有话想要告诉他？”记者问。

“没有话要说了。”傅医生回答。

社阵没落受文革影响？ 中国学者论点引发“舌战”

中国学者程映虹前天应邀在东南亚研究院主办的讲座上发表个人对中国文革对新加坡左派政治影响的研究心得，约有80人听讲，包括一些曾参与当年左派政治运动及学运的人物。

游润恬 报道

中国在文化大革命时期积极输出毛泽东主义，对象包括新加坡的左派人物。有中国学者因此认为一度被视为东南亚最大左派政党之一的社会主义阵线（社阵），就是因接触到文革思想而变得更加激进，进而走向没落。但是，曾参与当年新加坡左派政治运动的人物却对这样的结论提出质疑。

美国德拉华州立大学历史系副教授程映虹博士（51岁）的研究认为，社阵领袖就是因受到1966年爆发的文革影响，而变得更加激进，以致在同年决定集体放弃13个议席，走出议会展开街头斗争，继而在1968年杯葛国会选举，铸成重大战略错误。

随着文革的热度从70年代初逐渐减退，社阵的街头斗争姿态也有所改变，并在1972年宣布重新参加国会选举。然而它在那个时候大势已去，最终在1988年解散。

程映虹说：“文革对社阵的进一步衰败起到很消极的影响，对左派运动的最后瓦解，也有着摧毁性的作用。”

他也说：“另一个元素是，文革时的内斗，导致社阵上下不团结，促使左派运动最终瓦解。”

程映虹前天应邀在东南亚研究院主办的讲座上发表个人对中国文革对新加坡左派政治影响的研究心得，约有80人听讲，包括一些曾参与当年左派政治运动及学运的人物。

前左派领袖现身说法

前社阵助理秘书长傅树介医生（77岁，当年用傅树楷这个名字）在答问时间对程映虹的论点提出质疑。他认为文革对本地当年的左派政治固然有一些影响，但是对社阵最致命的打击绝对是政府在1963年展开的“冷藏行动”。

政府在被指为对付参与颠覆活动的左派分子而展开的这项大逮捕行动中逮捕了百余名左派人物及工运领袖，包括社阵秘书长林清祥、傅树介及多名社阵领袖。

傅树介认为社阵后来不成气候，主要是因为非常具号召力的林清祥被关进牢里，无法带领社阵赢取选票。另一方面，政府当时不让人民有集会或言论自由，又以逮捕及关

进监牢等手段来对付异议分子，无形中促使一些左派人物的想法变得更为激进。

他也指出，政府在冷藏行动中抓了林清祥和其他较温和的领袖，但却不抓那些思想比较激进的左派人士。结果接手领导社阵及另一个左派政党新加坡人民党的，自然是比较激进的人。是这个冷藏行动的后果导致左派政党走上极左路线，而不是文革的影响。

程映虹表示尊重及重视当年参与左派运动者的意见，也同意“冷藏行动”对他们的确也有一定的影响，但文革因素仍不容忽视。

他在介绍本身的论点时说：“‘冷藏行动’使社阵不可能成为一个有效的执政党，但是在‘冷藏行动’之后，社阵仍有可能在国会里成为有效的反对党，而文革的影响却使它连这个可能性都失去了。”

他受访时说，中国在水文时期虽对西方国家断绝来往，但它当时却很积极地输出革命。

他指出，在文革以前，以总理周恩来为首的中国温和派领导人为了顾及政府和政府之间的关

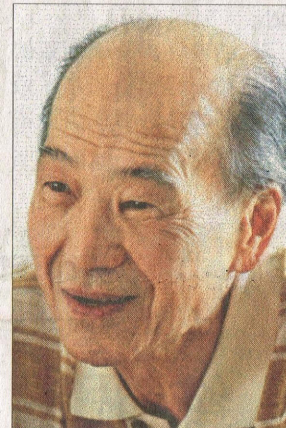


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系，而不高调支持其他国家的革命运动。但是在文革初期，中国共产党却把外交关系抛在一边，转而积极支持外国的革命运动。外交部的运作当时虽然受到影响，但是中共中央对外联络部这个当时输出革命的主要机构却是照常运作，例如透过多种渠道，包括对外广播和刊物，把文革思想输出到新加坡。

另外，当年的照片也显示许多从香港开来的货船也在船身上展示反对人民行动党政府的横幅。

一名参加过当年学运的与会者问道林清祥当时到底跟马来亚共产党有没有关系，傅树介答说社阵并没直接受到马共指示，



前社阵助理秘书长傅树介：对社阵最致命的打击是政府在1963年展开的“冷藏行动”。

所有决定都是党中央执行委员会开会讨论的结果。

社阵是由一群在1961年脱离行动党的左派人物成立的政党，即使受到“冷藏行动”的打击，它仍在1963年的议会选举中赢得13个议席。

程映虹出生于中国，1994年赴美国念博士学位。他在2007年到新加坡国立大选的亚洲研究院进行短期研究时遇到《与陈平对话》一书的作者陈剑。陈剑当时建议他参考社阵机关报，他于是在国家图书馆找到《阵线报》、《党寻》及当年新加坡人民阵线的机关报《人民论坛》，发现这些公开且定期出版的左派政党刊物所使用的语言跟中



马来亚共产党史料研究者陈剑：把文革说成是社阵式微的决定性因素，有夸大之嫌。

国在文革时使用的语言非常相似，因此推断文革思想当年对本地的左派政治人物有一定的影响。

陈剑：文革影响并非决定性的

本地左派政党社会主义阵线走向没落的决定性因素，是中国文革的影响，还是新加坡政府的镇压？

马来亚共产党史料研究者陈剑（陈松沾）认为把文革说成是社阵式微的决定性因素，有夸大之嫌。导致社阵走向没落及最终瓦解的原因是多重的，包括内部因素如当时的党主席李绍祖采取极左路线，外部因素如1963年的冷藏行动，以及人民行动党建国后能够在预期内实现经济目标等。

陈剑指出李绍祖当年公开说要从“非武装司令部”的角度来领导全马来亚的左派斗争，这种极左的姿态多少是受到了文革的影响。

他说：“文革的思想为本地左派人士提供了精神粮食，也为本地左派思想的蔓延，起着推波助澜的作用。”

但归根究底，文革的影响并非决定性的。“若要比政府镇压及文革的影响，政府的镇压肯定是更直接、更重要的因素。”