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in taiwan

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Human Rights Day celebration followed by mass-arrest of opposition leaders in Taiwan

December 15, 1979

The news of the mass-arrest of virtually all prominent leaders of the democratic opposition movement in Taiwan was received with shock, anger, and dismay by Taiwanese on the island and by the Taiwanese community abroad.

In this issue of our Newsletter we will present a detailed account of the events which led up to the arrests; in particular we will focus on the Human Rights Day celebration, which was held in the southern port city of Kaohsiung on December 10, 1979. It is essential that an accurate picture of the series of events is presented to the American Government and to the American public, since the KMT regime will undoubtedly give an extremely distorted picture of the events, and will attempt to portray the arrested persons as "common criminals", "seditious elements", or even "communists".

In this Newsletter you will find an eyewitness-account of the Kaohsiung event by an American citizen, Ms. Linda Gail Arrigo, who is believed to be the only American who attended the Human Rights Day celebration. Ms. Arrigo's husband Shih Ming-teh (), is the manager of Meili Tai (Formosa Magazine) one of the major publications of Taiwan's democratic movement.

Ms. Arrigo was detained by the National Police Administration (NPA) on December 14, and was held at the NPA Foreign Affairs Office for about a day, before being deported on December 15, 1979.

Preliminary Events

Meili Tao, the opposition publication, was established in August of this year. It was increasingly vocal in urging the Nationalist Chinese authorities to end the 30-year old martial law, to allow greater press freedom (during the past year approximately a dozen opposition publications have been banned), to release political prisoners, and to allow the opposition movement to form a party. The ruling KMT (Kuomintang - Nationalist Chinese party) has not permitted the formation of an opposition party: Taiwan is thus "effectively a one-party state" (the words of a U.S. State Department official at a hearing before the International Relations Committee of the U.S. House of Representatives in June 1977). An American scholar, who visited Taiwan during the past year, estimated that, if the opposition were allowed to form a party, and if truly free elections were held, the opposition would receive 60 - 70 % of the votes.

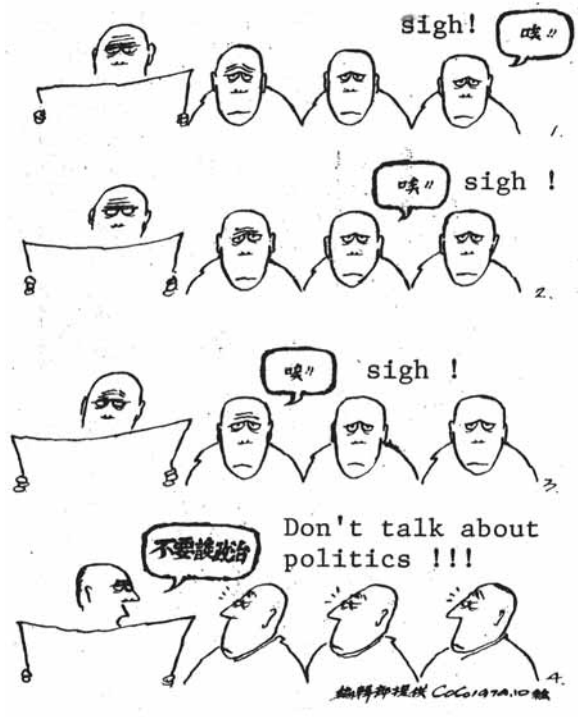
Meili Tao magazine proved tremendously popular: its circulation increased from 45,000 in August 1979 to 110,000 in November. It carried informative articles on political and social developments in Taiwan as well as abroad. Its cartoons were one of its major drawing cards. One cartoon with a telling message is reprinted below.



The publication was however not well liked by the governing authorities: in October there was an attempt to ban the magazine after it published an article critical of inequities in the economic development pattern in South Korea. The Korean embassy in Taipei urged the Taiwan authorities to close down the magazine. However, the opinion of more liberal and enlightened members of the ruling KMT prevailed over the military-dominated right wing, and **Meili Tao** continued to publish.

Armed attacks against Meili Tao

In the beginning of November a series of attacks against branch offices of **Meili Tao** started. On November 6th a group of 6 or 7 men rushed into the Kaohsiung branch office, armed with axes and Japanese swords, and destroyed the furniture and broke all windows. The magazine staff immediately went to the police to ask for an investigation and for police protection against further attacks. The response of the chief of police: *“This must be a feud between you and some other people We will not interfere.”*



On November 29th the second attack came: this time some 10 people attacked the Kaohsiung office in a similar fashion as the earlier attack, while **simultaneously** some 20 people attacked the home of Huang Hsin-hsieh, (, an independent member of the Legislative Yuan, and publisher of Meili Tao) in Taipei, destroying furniture and breaking windows.

The staff of **Meili Tao** suspected that the attacks were the work of vigilante gangs, condoned - if not actively encouraged - by Taiwan’s secret police agencies (the Taiwan Garrison Command and the Investigation Bureau). The similarity between the attacks, and the fact that the perpetrators were all in their twenties, and had short, military-style hair, also point in the direction of this conclusion.

On December 7th yet another attack against a **Meili Tao** branch-office took place: this time in Pingtung (), at the southern tip of Taiwan. By now, the

opposition was becoming angered by the attacks and frustrated by the inaction of the police. On December 8th some 5,000 people attended a meeting in Pingtung to protest the attacks and to demand police action against the vigilante groups.

Two Meili Tao staff member beaten up in police custody

For several weeks the democratic opposition movement had been planning a large scale celebration in Kaohsiung to commemorate the 31st anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (December 10, 1979). On Sunday, the 9th of December, posters were put up around Kaohsiung, and in the evening two sound-trucks went out to broadcast the event - Taiwan style - by driving through the streets and announce the celebration via loudspeakers on the back of the trucks.

At approximately 9:30 pm the two trucks were stopped by police, and after a brief scuffle two staff members were taken into custody, and taken to a nearby police station. Immediately a number of opposition leaders went to the police station to request the release of the two. After approximately 45 minutes the police informed the group that the two men had been transferred into the custody of the Taiwan Garrison Command (TGC), which had an office next door to the police station.

The group went to the TGC authorities to attempt to negotiate the release of the two. Finally, shortly after 2:00 am in the morning of December 10th, they were released. They were taken by the TGC to the **Meili Tao** office. There the opposition discovered that the two had been badly beaten up while in the custody of the police: one had a concussion and a broken tooth, while the other sustained damage to his kidneys. Both had severe bruises on their chest and back, and had prints of police boots on their shirts.

The opposition group took the two immediately to a hospital, and deposited statements with a legal magistrate in order to start legal proceedings against the police officers who made the arrests.

Needless to say that the incident, coming after the earlier attacks against the magazine's offices, further inflamed the emotions of the people in Kaohsiung.

The Human Rights Day Celebration

Here we present a transcript of Ms. Linda Arrigo's eyewitness account of the event, which took place in downtown Kaohsiung in the evening of December 10, 1979.



Banner for Human Rights at Kaohsiung

Linda Gail Arrigo: "What has happened today will have more repercussions than the incident in November 1977 (the Chungli incident when some 10,000 people took to the streets in the Northern city of Chungli in protest against election fraud by officials of the ruling KMT - Ed.). Today we planned a march. We were told this morning that we could not have a location for giving speeches for Human Rights Day. We made posters and large banners with human rights proclamations, and we also prepared insignia for everyone, and bamboo torches to light the way.

People came from all over the island, and we were filled with a togetherness that we had not felt before. We left our quarters in an orderly fashion at about seven o'clock (Monday evening, December 10 1979 - Ed.) with two vehicles on which sound amplification systems had been mounted. We moved about three blocks

down to an intersection.....to a very large intersection right by the side of the police station. Within a short time the riot police trucks were driving up. We stopped, sang some folk songs, and had some speeches. Then we were entirely surrounded by riot police.

By this time there were several thousand onlookers, and there were about 200 of us in our core group, but many people from the crowd were starting to join in with us. Then the riot trucks moved towards us from the direction in which we were heading, and came closer and closer to us. We turned around and moved towards the police station, where we started negotiations: we said that if they would lift their cordon and let the people in to hear what we had to say, we would not have the torchlight march, but they refused.

So we were being closed in by the riot trucks on one side and by a thin line of riot troops in full gear on the other side. When the people in the crowd on the sidelines saw the police attacking us, they rushed to our aid and pushed the riot police back, and they (the police) were scattered all over. I could see the flicker of fear in their eyes, they (the police) didn't really want to fight. They moved back very quickly.

We moved then forward.... the crowd went with us...we walked about five or six blocks, and came back to the front of the **Meili Tao** office. By the time we came back to the office it must have been nine o'clock. Then things were very peaceful: we had a large crowd around us, and we continued to sing Taiwan folk songs. There were many strong statements: "*We want human rights, we want democracy, we want an end to dictatorial government and martial law.*" All through the march it was repeated: "*This is our land, this is the place of the Taiwanese, the Beautiful island is ours.*"

We had a large gathering, we listened to a few speeches, a speech by Lu Hsiu-lien (Taiwan's women's rights leader - Ed.). It seemed that the riot troops had all dispersed, except for small groups that were standing at attention. I walked around and talked to them a little bit, and said hello to them, and said that we had no anger against them personally. I saw that many of them were only eighteen years old, so young' so young. It seems as though they had no comprehension of what was going on.....as though they **had** to be there. I don't know why they (the authorities —Ed.) sent out such children.

More and more people joined the gathering. It was a gathering which **affirmed** the strength and the rights of the Taiwanese. It was a peaceful gathering for about an hour and a half. I don't exactly know how many people were there — maybe about 10,000 or so. Not all the people could hear, because our amplification system could not reach the edge of the crowd. I went to the outer fringe of the crowd, and I didn't see any other police or riot troops approaching, And I didn't see any antagonistic behavior on the part of the police that were there.



The police detonate teargas cannisters into the crowd

I went back. We were planning to disperse at about that point in time. We were trying to decide how we should end the meeting and disperse.

And **then**, at a little after 10 o'clock maybe 10:30, the **riot police trucks arrived and smashed into the crowd**. They approached at a fair speed, and they rammed their way into the center of the intersection. A lot of people in the crowd rushed forward at them. we continued to sing for a while, but then they started to fire teargas grenades, but the teargas floated away in the wind.

The people responded by throwing their torches, it was quite a sight to see the torches fly through the air and then bounce off the riot gear of the police. Then the police fired several more teargas canisters at the

crowd. The people didn't leave it seems as if they wanted to stand up to the police....they would not leave.

These troops were not the regular police, but the military riot troops. The crowd managed to push back the first one or two riot trucks that came, but then about three arrived at the same time, and they could not force them to leave. The troops shot more teargas grenades, and the crowd fell back, and it fell back.



Military riot troops moving in on the demonstrators

In the meantime we kept going with our chants. The cheers were very, very moving. As the crowd was being attacked we continued our chants:

Human rights for the people of Taiwan, democracy for the people of Taiwan.
and the crowd continued to respond to this.

We were standing, with the other “tang-wai” (non-party democratic opposition - Ed.) people right in front of the door of the **Meili Tao** office. We stood fast, but finally we were hit with teargas too, and we retreated slowly. For a while we were almost crushed by the pressure of the crowd. We left the scene probably at about 10:40 pm.

I have a feeling that the repercussions from this event will be severe. Several of our people had nasty cuts and bruises. I didn't see any serious injuries. I did see - very much to my grief - one young riot police unconscious on the ground, but some of our people kindly picked him up and helped him until he regained consciousness.

What we saw, I think, was tremendous anger at the authorities....perhaps more than I would have expected. We saw a tremendous rise in “Taiwan consciousness” (as opposed to Nationalist Chinese consciousness - Ed.), and a real cry against martial law.

There were several major speakers: Huang Hsin-chieh (), Yao Chia-wen (), Chang Chun-nan (), and Shih Ming-teh () spoke for a short time. The young people from the Presbyterian Church also made a very strong showing, particularly in keeping songs going to encourage and strengthen everyone, even when charged by the riot police.

It is difficult for me to express how momentous this is. It is sad that people were injured. Almost all violence that happened was caused by the authorities trying to meddle and contain, and in their

attacking us. I would say that it was a major step forward in strengthening the identity of the Taiwan people, but whatever will happen now may not be pleasant, but it is a pleasure to see the people express themselves. It is painful to see that people may be hurt in the violence: I feel this very deeply. Please tell everyone to be concerned. I think I think that there could be a massive roundup. If so, then we can only say that that is the course of history.

Let me tell you again the text on the banners that we had:

Remember Human Rights Day

Meili Tao, the Magazine of Taiwan's Democratic Movement

Taiwan Human Rights Committee

We also had one for our newly-founded Taiwan Human Rights Action Center. We also had about thirty placards with texts such as:

Rescind the 30-year old martial law

Give us our freedom of speech

Release all the political prisoners

We repeatedly sang a Christian song that is rendered into Taiwanese to the tune of "We shall overcome", and the Taiwanese version of the "Battle Hymn of the Republic", to which we added verses with

Human rights, human rights is what we are seeking

and *Democracy, democracy is what we are seeking.*

That is all I can say for now. Please keep in contact. Goodbye."

The Repercussions

The repercussions of the event were indeed severe: when the **Meili Tao** staff returned to the Kaohsiung branch office on Tuesday morning they found it totally destroyed by the riot troops.

On Wednesday December 12th, most opposition leaders returned to Taipei, and held a press conference. The reporters of the government-controlled press refused to believe the account of the democratic opposition leaders, and physically attacked them.

In the early morning of December 13, 1979 agents of Taiwan's two major secret police agencies - the Taiwan Garrison Command (TGC) and the Investigation Bureau (IB) - rounded up the first 14 members of the democratic opposition. As of the time of this writing 138 people have been arrested. The American Institute in Taiwan (AIT) office in Washington D.C. indicated that the number of arrested may reach 150 or more.

The names of the most prominent opposition leaders are listed here :

1. Huang Hsin-chieh (黃信介, and independent member of the Legislative Yuan, Taiwan's national legislature) and publisher of Meili Tao)



2. Yao Chia-wen (姚嘉文, a prominent lawyer, and a member of Taiwan's Provincial Assembly)



3. Lin I-hsiung (林義雄, also a lawyer; Mr. Lin recently visited the U.S. at the invitation of the U.S. State Department)



5. Lü Hsiu-lien (呂秀蓮, the leader of Taiwan's women's rights movement; Ms. Lu is a former Harvard student)



6. Ch'en Chü (陳菊, Ms. Chen is an editor and writer; she recently returned to Taiwan from a speaking tour through the United States)



7. Chang Chün-hung (張俊宏, Mr. Chang is chief editor of Meili Tao and a member of Taiwan's Provincial Assembly).



8. Wei T'ing-ch'ao (魏廷朝 Mr. Wei is a former political prisoner, adopted by Amnesty International. He served 15 years for co-authoring a Taiwanese "Declaration of Independence in 1964)



9. Wang T'o (王拓, a writer and literary critic)



10. Chang Fu-chung (張富忠 co-author of a book on the 1977 election campaign; Mr. Chang lived in the U.S. from February through November 1979)

11. Chou P'ing-teh (周平德 a member of the Provincial Assembly, from Kaohsiung)

12. Ch'en Chung-hsin (陳忠信 one of Meili Tao's editorial writers)

13. Chi Wan-sheng (紀萬生 an election campaign manager for one of the opposition leaders.



Action

It is essential that immediate action is taken to impress upon the governing authorities in Taiwan that no harm should be done to the arrested persons. It is not beyond the Taiwan Garrison Command and other secret police agencies to torture people: The Amnesty International Report on Taiwan for 1977 indicated that torture was used in some instances during interrogation. Considering the gravity of the crisis in Taiwan, and the large number of people arrested, we have to expect widespread torture.

At this time an extensive press-campaign is being waged in Taiwan, asking for the death penalty for the arrested persons. Some sources in Taiwan indicate that a number of the arrested opposition leaders may be executed without trial: their death would then be declared "accidental" or "suicide" by the authorities.

We appeal to President Carter, the State Department, and U.S. Senators and Representatives to take immediate steps to prevail upon the governing authorities in Taiwan to

1. Release all members of the democratic opposition.
2. Move towards a more democratic political system.
3. End martial law.
4. Guarantee freedom of the press, assembly, and religion.

We appeal to the American people to express their concern about the arrests to U.S. authorities, and to the governing authorities in Taiwan.

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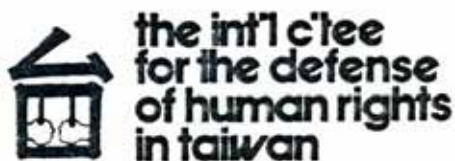
General Wang Ching-hsu
Commander
Taiwan Garrison Command
Taipei TAIWAN

We suggest that the United States still has considerable leverage on the governing authorities in Taiwan: this past summer the U.S. signed a \$240 million arms sale package with Taiwan, so Taiwan can “defend itself against China”. We may suggest that this sale should now be suspended until the opposition leaders are released: the best defense against communism is a free and democratic political system.

We appeal to the American news media to take a closer look at Taiwan, and in particular examine the aspirations of the Taiwanese for a free, democratic, and independent Taiwan.

The International Committee for the Defense of Human Rights in Taiwan (ICDHRT) campaigns for the release of political prisoners in Taiwan, and supports the democratic movement on the island. Please help us with your contributions.

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