

J. R. M. P.

27 Feb. 1978

A blow against human rights

Review Public Order Ordinance

I WRITE in support of the letters of J. Geitner and the Faculty of the Social Work Department of the Baptist College concerning the trial of boat people and the concerned young people who tried to help them.

To find them guilty is to admit that human rights in Hongkong are taboo and anyone who seeks them is a law-breaker.

From my conversations with some of the police who arrested them, I would gather that the orders came from a higher level, and I gained the impression that a few of the police found it a most distasteful job.

Certainly they did their best to make sure that the persons who could not produce bail money were bailed out without handing over cash.

What I do not excuse as far as the police are concerned was the arrest of small children. The person who ordered that should be taken to task.

The most disturbing factor is that social workers have been intimidated. Those who do not succumb to intimidation must be feeling antagonism towards the Government, which they did not feel before. Those who yield to intimidation will be lost to the human rights cause.

I happen to know a number of the social workers arrested. They are sensible, reasonable and concerned people. They meet people with problems and try to help. For this, they are to have criminal records.

Surely this reflects on the Government's mentality, not on the fine young people who were found guilty. They should never have been arrested and charged in the first place.

If the Government wishes to retain any kind of credibility, it should at once recommend that these records be struck out by order of the Governor:

ELSIE ELLIOTT (Mrs)

AS an ecumenical organisation committed to community development, we are deeply concerned about the recent experience of the Yaumati boat people.

During the past two years, these less fortunate members of our community have tried, in various peaceful ways, to tell us of the unthinkable adverse conditions under which they have been living and demanded rightly that they should be immediately rehoused. But the Government did not respond.

On January 7, together with supporters including social workers, college students, a doctor and a Catholic priest, they went to petition the Governor and were all arrested on the way and charged with "unlawful assembly."

The fact that some members of our community who contribute to our present state of affluence should have to live in such unbearable conditions for years clearly reflects the Government's failure to honour their very basic human rights, as well as a total lack of policy and planning.

Instead of assuming its responsibility of housing the boat people, the Government responded with oppressive measures of arrest and prosecution. We find it very difficult to see how this goes with the Government's claimed commitment to community building.

How can we build a community when people's initiative and participation are not encouraged but suppressed?

We are in full support of the boat people and we urge that their demand should be honoured immediately.

With regard to the Public Order Ordinance under which the boat people and their supporters were prosecuted, we feel a strong need for its being reviewed. From the viewpoint of professional community social work practice, this ordinance has outlived its relevance and it puts undue restraints on the professional activities of social workers.

One can be arrested and prosecuted for almost anything a community development worker is doing in the course of his work.

In view of this we express our hope that the Government will look again at the problem of the boat people. We urge the Government to revise the Public Order Ordinance without delay in order to allow peaceful petitioning.

THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE,
Tsun Wan, Tai Wo Hau and Kwai Chung
Ecumenical Community Development Project