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Save a life

Adopt a political prisoner

By PAUL THOMSON

A Frenchman, imprisoned for two years by the South Vietnamese regime for political activities, told a York audience Monday that his release last December was only due to the pressure of French public opinion and the unwillingness of the South Vietnamese authorities to have him witness the liquidation of Vietnamese political prisoners.

Jean-Pierre Debris, along with Andre Menras, was released by the Saigon government and expelled from South Vietnam last December. Their release represented success for the campaign of a Paris organization, Secours Populaire Francais, which mobilized public opinion across France.

Debris and Menras are touring Europe, North America and Japan in order to arouse world opinion and save the lives of the prisoners who remain in Saigon's jails.

Debris, who came to speak at York, proposed that everyone at the meeting adopt a political prisoner and write both him and the Saigon embassy in the U.S. asking his whereabouts and why he was arrested. Such agitation "could save lives, many lives" Debris said.

Debris was critical of the apparent desire of Canada to pull out of the International Commission of Central and Supervision. It is very important, he said, that Canadian observers inspect conditions in the South Vietnamese prisons and describe them to the public.

In Canada, the international committee to free South Vietnamese political prisoners from detention, torture and death has been set up to mobilize public opinion. Its offices in Toronto are at 52 Elgin Avenue.

At the end of Debris' address, the meeting passed a resolution which called for the Canadian and other governments to take action to force South Vietnamese President Thieu "to provide humane treatment and prompt release under public international inspection and control for these political prisoners".

Debris, who looks about 10 years older than his 28 years, was arrested in July 1970 along with Menras for unfurling the National Liberation Front flag and distributing peace leaflets in front of the National

Assembly in Saigon. They had gone to South Vietnam in 1968 as exchange teachers.

Although he did not care about the war when he went to Vietnam, Debris said the corruption and killing he encountered there forced him to end his silence. He told his audience he has never belonged to any political organization.

He first ran into corruption when giving a French exam in Saigon. High-ranking officials, including members of the Thieu cabinet, approached Debris in hopes of obtaining exam copies so their sons would pass and therefore be exempt from the draft. According to Debris, the "price" of the exam rose to \$3,000.

When Debris and Menras were arrested they were beaten on the spot and interrogated for five days at the Chi Hoa prison. During this interrogation they were not personally tortured, but instead intimidated by having to watch the torture of a Vietnamese prisoner.

According to Debris the South Vietnamese authorities call their prisons for political dissidents "rehabilitation centres". What is termed "re-education" consists of saluting the Saigon regime's flag every morning.

"Every political prisoner had to stand at attention at 6:30 a.m." Debris said.

Those who refuse are termed "obstinate" and placed in the "movie room", so named for its function as a theatre for showing films to American delegations when not being used for torture. From 300 to 400 prisoners can be chained in various positions to an iron bar which surrounds the room, Debris said.

During their time in Chi Hoa, Debris and Menras met many prisoners who had been tortured including those who had lost the ability to walk after being held in "tiger cages". Three to five prisoners are placed in cages in which a man cannot stand. The cages are kept in unventilated areas where there is no light. Less than one pound of rice a day is rationed to each prisoner and there are no sanitary facilities. At present the R.M.K. Company of the U.S. has a \$400,000 contract for the provision of an "improved" version of these cages, Debris said.

In November, 1972, after rumours of a ceasefire began to circulate, the man exposed in 1970 as the inventor of the tiger cages returned from anonymity to become director of Chi Hoa. Rations were reduced even further. With a ceasefire approaching, the administration began to mix political prisoners with common criminals. The files on political prisoners were also removed or changed, Debris said, so they would be indistinguishable from criminals. Family visits were ended so that relatives lost track of prisoners.

The prisons also contain hundreds of children according to Debris. One boy was jailed at the age of four with his father and spent the next three years there. One 12-year-old was arrested for trying to steal a gun from an American soldier. When he refused to answer whether he was a member of an organization and what his parents were doing, he was tortured. Debris said the torturer told the boy "your hands are very small, but they are large enough to take a gun. That is why I am beating you".

MEMO TO RESIDENCE STUDENTS

FROM: York University Food Services Department,

Norman D. Crandles, Assistant Director Ancillary Services

This year a Residence Fee Committee, comprising students and representatives from both Ancillary Services and the Colleges was formed to study proposals of next year's fee structure for undergraduate residents. In an effort to keep residence fees as low as possible, the committee has examined several alternative cost saving measures.

One of the alternatives would involve a change from the existing fixed 'meal entitlement' plan to a 'dollar commitment' plan. Under the latter system, there would be a minimum dollar payment for the food portion of your residence fee (this year the 10 meal plan is the minimum food contract). Unlike a meal plan however, students would be free to use up their dollar commitment in an a-la-carte fashion, i.e., to eat only those items of his or her choosing at any meal or time of day, to entertain friends, to utilize any Food Service outlet including specialty restaurants, Central Square Cafeteria, Atkinson Coffee Shop, etc.

It is visualized that should this particular system be favourably received that the method of applying sales could be by a small value card (say \$20) which would be punched at the cash register at the time of purchase, to a declining balance until the value of the card is exhausted.

Inevitably, the cost of a-la-carte dining is greater per equivalent meal than under the present system, however the total expenditure for food by a student could approximate the 1972-73 academic term, as the student would not pay for meals not consumed nor unwanted second helpings.

The University Food Service Department is anxious to be made aware of student opinion in this matter. York Campus Students are cordially invited to phone:

Norman Crandles (-3346)
Lyn Brooks (-3480), Ancillary Services
Gord Robertson (-6029), Founders College Don
Glendon Students: V. L. Berg (-6111) C. Pilley (-6149)



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