

# Peking story (American prisoners in China) - correspondence, letters and ca...

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Peking story - 1954

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29 May

Statement of the U.S. Delegation  
to the Geneva Conference.

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

GENEVA, May 29 -- The United States Delegation to the Geneva Conference today issued the following statement:

(Begin text) The attention of the United States Delegation has been drawn to news conferences held this week by the press spokesman of the Chinese Communist Delegation, at which the matter of American citizens imprisoned in Communist China has been discussed.

The Chinese spokesman has acknowledged that 20 or 30 Americans are under arrest. He named six of them.

While this quasi-official confirmation of the lot and whereabouts of these Americans is welcome, the United States Delegation must point out that it is tragically late in coming, and that the information is woefully inadequate.

For four years, the United States Government has made persistent efforts to obtain information about American citizens detained in China. Their families have made similar attempts. Until now, however, the Chinese Communist authorities have failed even to acknowledge the inquiries addressed to them, let alone provide the information requested.

In most instances, the United States Government and the families concerned have been unable to find out whether these persons are alive or dead. To cite one example: in 1952, an American missionary died in prison in Canton, as the result of gross mistreatment. Not until six months later, by roundabout ways, did word of his death reach the outside world. There has not yet been an official communication about it from the Chinese authorities.

The Chinese Communist press spokesman is reported to have said that, in future, relatives will be allowed to send letters to the Americans held in prison. This, too, is welcome; and it is to be hoped that other steps to improve their lot will follow. But it must be pointed out that to receive mail is an elementary privilege, which ought to have been granted from the beginning.

The United States Government and people continue to be deeply concerned about the welfare of those Americans, civilian and military, who have been imprisoned by the Chinese Communist authorities, or otherwise prevented from returning to the United States. They continue to desire full information as to their whereabouts and wellbeing. The United States Government will continue to make every feasible effort to bring about the release of these citizens.

The Chinese Communist spokesman also spoke of Chinese students and other Chinese nationals residing in the United States; and, on this matter, he made some statements that are without foundation in fact, and others that constitute grave distortion of the facts.

Here are the facts:

When the Communists by force of arms conquered mainland China, several thousand Chinese students were attending American schools and universities. The overwhelming majority chose, of their own free will, not to return to their homeland.

A number, however, did wish to return to China. Until the outbreak of the Korean war, and the Chinese Communists' aggression in Korea, they were permitted freely to do so: in 1949 and 1950, approximately 1,000 Chinese students departed from the United States.

In June, 1951 -- under the authority of the Passport Control Act of 1918 (as amended in 1941), which authorized the President to control the departure of aliens; and, subsequently, under Section 215(a)1 of the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1952, which superseded the Passport Act of 1918 -- regulations were issued setting up controls over the departure of certain foreign nationals from the United States.

This was at a time when the United States was serving as the United Nations command in Korea; and these regulations were designed to protect the security of the United States and its allies in that war.

Since 1951, 434 Chinese students have applied for exit permits. Of these, 314 have been permitted to depart -- 150 in 1951, 53 in 1952, 84 in 1953, 27 in 1954. For security reasons, exit permits were temporarily denied the other 120. (Since October, 1953, only four Chinese have been denied permission to leave: the last refusal took place in January, 1954.) The Attorney General is now re-studying the cases of these 120. It is anticipated that many of them have by now changed their minds: they have taken permanent jobs, and will no longer wish to leave the United States. Those who do will have their status given careful review.

It is to be emphasized that none of the Chinese in the United States has been imprisoned, detained, or mistreated. All have enjoyed, and enjoy, complete freedom of movement: they are free to communicate with anyone, and free to accept any employment they choose. The sole restriction on those denied permission to leave is that once every three months they must report in writing to the Immigration Office in the district in which they reside their current address and occupation.

As of April 30, 1954, there were 5,242 Chinese in the United States on student visas. Many of these are now teaching, or otherwise employed. Since April, 1949, the United States Government has given financial assistance to 3,642 Chinese students in the United States -- this with no strings attached, so far as their departure from the United States was concerned. This government aid was in addition to substantial assistance Chinese students received from private citizens and organizations. (End text)