

Translators and persecution

One of the *Language International* articles which has created the greatest stir was a worldwide survey (LI 5.5) by Raynald Adams, of Toronto, Canada, on translators who had suffered imprisonment or worse for their work and principles. Raynald Adams continues to monitor events, and has now written to inform us of events which have come to his attention since that article.

Raynald Adams

One of the people killed in the burning of a hotel in Sivas, eastern Turkey, on July 2, 1993, was *Asim Bezirci*, a literary critic, writer of many books, and translator. This hotel was where *Aziz Nesin*, another Turkish author and translator, was staying during an arts festival; Nesin had just published excerpts from his Turkish translation of Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses*.

In Tibet, the writer, editor and translator *Menlha Kyab* was reportedly arrested in Hainan during the week of July 16-21, 1993, around the time of the visit to the region by Chinese Communist Party secretary Jiang Zemin, as were around 60 other people including Samdrup Tsering, a former translator who was doing postgraduate studies at the Nationalities Institute in Xining, and *Tenpa Kelsang*, editor of *Tibetan Language and Literature*, the magazine published by the Lhasa branch of the Hainan Tibetan Language Committee. It has been said that these people had been arrested under suspicion that they had prepared leaflets for distribution at the celebrations marking the 40th anniversary of the founding of the Tibetan Autonomous Region.

In Vietnam, *Dang Phuc Tue*, also known as *Thich Quang Do*, a novelist, translator and Buddhist scholar, was arrested on August 6, 1977, with another monk. Both were tortured and held in solitary confinement for 20 months. Re-arrested in 1982, Dang was deported to his native village in North Vietnam. Since then, he has been under house arrest and forbidden to perform religious activities. The only reason given for his arrest was: "By carrying out religious activities, you are *ipso facto* carrying out political activities".

In Myanmar, Burma, following his arrest on September 6, 1990, the National League for Democracy party Member of Parliament for Mandalay South-east, *Ohn Kyaing*, also known as *Aung Wint*, a translator of English-language newspapers into Burmese, and former editor of the *Bohtataung Daily*, was sentenced on October 17, 1990, to seven years' hard labour under Sections 5(a), (b) and (j) of the 1950 Emergency Provisions Act. He had accused the Tatmadaw of brutally breaking up monks' and students' demonstrations in Mandalay in August 1990.

In Algeria, on July 31, 1993, *Merzak Baghtache*, a journalist, novelist, translator, literary critic, painter and musician, was reported to have been hit in the cheek and sustained a broken jaw from one of four bullets fired at him in the Bab El-Oued district of Algiers. Baghtache is a member of the National Consultative Council and of the Commission on play-reading run by the Ministry of Culture. He had been a member of the Council on Literature and Information under the Hamrouche government and

formerly worked as a journalist for the government-run Algiers Press Service.

As you can see, the repression does not stop against our colleagues living and working in other parts of the world. It would be hard, therefore, to continually update the *Language International* readership on what is happening elsewhere, since human rights advocacy is often performed without knowledge of its results.

Generally, the translation community has not been as responsive as I had hoped it would be following publication of my earlier article, in taking action to ease the plight of our colleagues living and working in countries where their human rights are violated.

Sometimes there is good news. Cuban essayist and translator *Jorge Pomar Montalvo* was released from Ariza Prison in Cienfuegos province in August 1993. A member of *Criterio Alternativo*, the opposition group of intellectuals campaigning for economic and political reform, he had reportedly been the object of an *acto de repudio* (denunciation by a government-inspired crowd) and was arrested in No-

vember 1991, after *Criterio Alternativo* had produced and distributed leaflets calling for reform at the Fourth Cuban Communist Party congress in October of that year. He was sentenced on November 28, 1991, at the closed court *Tribunal Municipal de la Habana des Este* to two years in prison for "illegal association" and "defamation", and his sentence was confirmed at an appeal hearing on December 4, 1991. He was reportedly half blind in one eye due to beatings received during the *acto de repudio* and is said to have suffered a broken nose and ribs. Pomar had translated Erich Hackl, Stephan Hermlin and Nelida Pinon, among others. He had received the Cuban National Award for Literary Translation in the late 1980s.

In Iran, translator and Christian evangelist *Mehdi Dibaj*, sentenced to death for apostasy by the Islamic Revolutionary Court on December 3, 1993, was freed from prison on January 16, 1994, following an appeal and an international campaign for his release. Dibaj, who converted to Christianity 46 years ago, had been detained since 1984.

Raynald Adams would be grateful for any further information, or observations on his reports. Language International would be pleased to supply his address to anyone who writes to the editorial office, and who can establish his credentials to our satisfaction.