

Freedom For Fr. Ed

Prison has not stilled his voice

Fr. Edicio de la Torre's attempts to put his faith into practice were cut short by his arrest, on December 13, 1974 by government agents. But even in prison, his voice would not be stilled. Caught with others in a series of arrests, he denounced the torture and maltreatment that the other detainees were subjected to. For two weeks shortly after his arrest, he together with Fr. Manuel Lahoz, went on a hunger strike to call attention to this inhuman practice.

Thanks to this protest action, the practice of torture became public knowledge and forced an embarrassed government to "investigate". For this, Fr. Ed was punished by being sent into isolation for seven months.

In January 1976, he joined another hunger strike staged by the detainees at Camp Olivas in Pampanga. This lasted for over two months and gained the release of two nursing mothers. Another demand that was granted was their transfer to a detention center in the Greater Manila area.

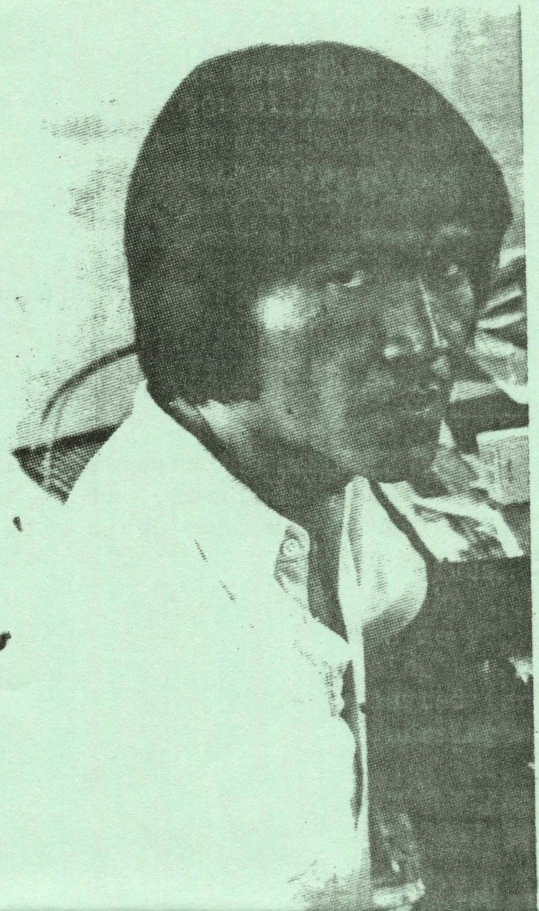
Thus in June 1976, Fr. Ed and the other political detainees at Camp Olivas were moved to Bicutan Rehabilitation Center (BRC), now PC-INP Jail, Camp Bagong Diwa. There they joined a larger number of detainees who had moved in earlier from other detention centers around Manila which were being phased out. A few days later, a hunger strike was declared which lasted for two weeks. Most of the demands were granted -- the release of two nursing mothers and the improvement of prison conditions.

Military authorities retaliate

Fr. Ed, accused as a leader of the hunger strike, was again punished by being transferred to another section in BRC, together with another alleged leader. This was accomplished with some violence, as the detainees put a struggle to prevent the transfer and troops had to be sent in. As a matter of fact, more detainees would be transferred in a series of retaliatory actions in an attempt to reduce the detainees to utter submission to repressive policies in the camp.

It would take more than a year before Fr. Ed was again allowed to return to the main body of detainees. He has been detained now for more than 5 years.

Meanwhile, his case has remained under restraining order by the Supreme Court since December 1976. He is charged with "conspiring to commit rebellion" and violation of Presidential Decree No. 53 relating to illegal possession of subversive materials. But all his co-accused (a total of more than 30), including Eduardo Senense who was released only on October 31, 1979, are now free.



Freedom for Fr. Ed.....

Appeal for Fr. Ed's release

Fr. Ed is the last Catholic priest in prison. What is ironic about his case is that a heavier charge against him, that of rebellion, has already been dropped. The length of his detention is already more than enough to serve his sentence were he convicted. His lawyer, ex-Senator Jose Diokno, has filed a petition with the Supreme Court for his release based on this fact.

Meantime, Fr. Ed celebrates mass every Sunday for the benefit of the detainees and their relatives. It is hoped that indeed Fr. Ed will soon attain his freedom and be once again with a greater number of people in need of his inspiration.

-adapted from Political Detainees Update
a publication of the Catholic
Task Force Detainees

32 seek help to free priest

WASHINGTON, Jan. 14 - A group of 32 Senators have appealed to Secretary of State Cyrus Vance to seek the release of a noted Filipino theologian and human rights activist.

In a letter written to Mr Vance in late December but made public only yesterday by US religious leaders working for the release of the Rev Edicio de La Torre, the senators asked for a meeting with Mr Vance "to discuss potential actions which might be taken to ease Father de La Torre's plight."

A spokesman for Sen. Carl Levin, democrat-Michigan, coordinator of the letter to Mr Vance, said no meeting has been held and there has been no official response from the State Department.

Mr Levin is now in Southeast Asia and is seeking a meeting with de La Torre in prison.

Arthur Keys of the United Church of Christ's board for homeland ministries and the human rights office

of the National Council of Churches said to date US government action on behalf of de La Torre has been "perfunctory."

"We feel the response has not been adequate," Keys said. "It is time the government put some reality to their human rights programme."

De La Torre, 36, is a Roman Catholic priest who has been jailed for more than five years by the regime of Philippines President Ferdinand Marcos.

He is well-known in Asian theological and ecumenical circles and his combination of theological thought and social activism on behalf of the poor has led him to be compared with Nobel Peace Prize nominee Dom Helder Camara of Brazil.

In their letter to Mr Vance, the 32 senators said de La Torre was charged - a year after he was arrested - with conspiracy to commit rebellion and

with possession of subversive materials.

"At present, he has served more time in prison than if he had already been convicted and sentenced to the minimum allowable terms, even if those terms had been imposed to run consecutively."

"The fact is," the senators said, "other than a preliminary hearing, Father de La Torre has not even been tried."

Meanwhile, the only Philippines publication to print opposition viewpoints consistently, the year-old weekly newspaper, We, has had its annual licence renewed by the Philippines Council for Print Media.

A condition of the licence of We, which last year was warned it was in danger of losing permission to publish because of alleged bias, was that it should "publish news and articles that are relevant to the objectives of the government." - Agencies

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