



1998

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Recommended Citation

Aaron, Bob, "Chinese Communist Prison Camp Survivor Harry Wu, Human-Rights Champion, to Speak at IWU, Nov. 4" (1998). *News and Events*. Paper 806.
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Oct. 20, 1998 Contact: Bob Aaron, 309/556-3181

Chinese Communist Prison Camp Survivor

Harry Wu, Human-Rights Champion, to Speak at IWU, Nov. 4

BLOOMINGTON, Ill.--He spent 19 years jailed in the "Bamboo Gulag" as a political prisoner.

He was arrested again in 1995, convicted of "stealing state secrets," sentenced to 15 years in prison, and then expelled from the People's Republic of China (PRC) in August 1995 in the aftermath of an international outcry.

Chinese-American human-rights champion Harry Wu will tell his remarkable story --one man's battle against the Beijing government--in a presentation, "Behind Prison Walls: The Red China," at Illinois Wesleyan University, Wednesday, Nov. 4, at 7:30 p.m. in the Main Lounge, Memorial Student Center, 104 E. University, Bloomington. The public is invited to Wu's presentation; admission is free-of-charge.

Ever defiant, Wu said after he was freed in 1995, "My release does not mean that the Chinese human-rights record has improved."

In previous campus appearances, Wu has spoken of prison camp torture and atrocities such as forced labor, executions, and the selling of executed prisoners' organs to Chinese hospitals.

Referring to occasional prisoners freed by the Communist Chinese, Wu has said: "Rather than focusing on one tree, we need to focus on the whole forest. Instead of freeing one or two key people, China should release all of those unjustly imprisoned in labor camps.

"It's sad," he added, "that I am unable to return to my own country. Each individual must do what they can to turn this situation around."

Wu has spent decades documenting slavery and human-rights abuses in his native country.

Officially, Wu was first jailed in China for stealing the equivalent of \$20 when he was a student at the Beijing Geology College. He claims his real crime was criticizing the Chinese Communist Party line on the Soviet invasion of Hungary during the 1957 Hundred Flowers campaign, a period of relative liberalization. He was labeled a counter-revolutionary rightist by the Chinese Communist party and jailed. Wu spent 19 years in China's laogai (prison camp) system, where he manufactured chemicals, mined coal, built roads, cleared land, and planted and harvested crops. He survived beatings, torture, and starvation. Wu was released in 1979 and came to the United States in 1985.

In 1995, Wu returned to China on a "spy mission" and was nabbed at the border. His intent was to record brutal prison conditions in China. He spent 66 days in prison, was convicted of spying, and was expelled from the PRC. While in Chinese captivity, Wu was under round-the-clock observation by guards as he lived in a 9-by-12 foot room.

In the aftermath of his release, Wu received a hero's welcome on Capitol Hill in Washington, D.C., where he urged U.S. lawmakers to use foreign trade as a weapon to force China to curb human-rights abuses.

The San Jose Mercury News quoted Wu as telling lawmakers: "All the [Chinese] plainclothes security people carried Motorola cellular phones. That American products are helping make China's repressive machine more efficient should be a moral concern to every thinking American."

The Chinese leaders, Wu added, "miscalculated the attention my case generated around the world. They had to find a way out, and they did. All-in-all, they failed politically. More people around the world know about the laogai today than [when he was taken prisoner]."

In that same Sept. 9, 1995, Mercury News article, U.S. Rep. Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.) was quoted

as saying: "The international publicity surrounding [Wu's] arrest continued to reveal to the world China's denial of basic human rights for citizens. The engine for much of China's explosive economic growth is powered by the backs of slave labor in the Chinese laogai system. Even calls for improvement in basic democratic freedoms are met with ruthless repression from Beijing."

Wu, a naturalized American, founded the Laogai Research Foundation in 1992 to publicize human-rights violations in the Chinese camps and provide information about products made with forced labor. Wu serves as the non-profit group's executive director.

Wu has been a research fellow at Stanford University's Hoover Institution. After his release in 1979, he was a visiting professor of geology at the University of California, Berkeley.

Wu is the author of "Bitter Winds: A Memoir of My Years in China's Gulag" and "Troublemaker: One Man's Crusade Against China's Cruelty."

Wu's IWU appearance is sponsored by the Student Senate Current Issues Committee.

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