

"A tough job for a sensitive Christian." These were the words which appeared at the top of an advertisement placed in the Australian Presbyterian Life magazine in February 1976. By this advertisement, the Board of Ecumenical Mission and Relations (BEMAR) of the then Presbyterian Church of Australia (now the Uniting Church in Australia) was seeking a person to work a Presbyterian industrial mission team in one of Asia's largest industrial areas. Though the advertisement did not say so, the country was Korea and the city Seoul.

The advertisement went on to say that "the job qualifications are pretty stringent." This was spelled out as follows:

"You need to be single, a committed Christian (not necessarily Presbyterian) and deeply sensitive to the Biblical demand for justice. You need a strong belief in the incarnation of God in Jesus Christ and a desire to follow his total identification with the poor, the outcast and the oppressed. You should have participated in struggle and experienced conflict with authority."

The person who responded to this advertisement was a young, Methodist Christian, Mr. Stephen Lavender. He was appointed to this challenging task and arrived in Korea on June 7, 1976. After nine months of Korean language study he took up his assigned work with the Yong Dong Po Urban-Industrial Mission in the south part of the city of Seoul where there are many industrial plants and tens of thousands of workers.

On June 17, 1978 Steve Lavender's participation in mission work in Korea came to an end--at least for the foreseeable future. However, Steve did not plan or wish it to be so. He along with his colleagues in the Yong Dong Po Urban Industrial Mission have in recent months come into increasing conflict with various Government authorities as they have tried to identify with the factory workers--many of whom are young women between the ages of 18 and 22. As a part of the Christian witness to the whole Gospel they have made themselves aware of the workers problems and have tried to help the workers achieve their rights under some very difficult circumstances. In this ministry Steve was associated with the Rev. Myung Jin In and with the Rev. Chi Song Cho both ministers of the Presbyterian Church of Korea. What they did together with the direction and support of the Yong Dong Po UIM Committee.

On Tuesday morning June 13, Steve was given notice by the ROK Immigration Office in Seoul that he was to leave Korea by Saturday the 17th. And so in compliance with that order, Steve took his leave of Korea at 5 o'clock on the afternoon of June 17th on a Japan Airlines flight bound for Osaka. As he left Steve was surrounded by a representative group of the workers, about 20 Protestant and Catholic missionary friends, and by a rather large number of police--some in plain clothes and some in uniform. The uniformed police suddenly appeared as Steve made his way through the departing passengers lounge at Kimpo International Airport. There was no disorder, but apparently some apprehension on the part of the authorities that there might be. As Steve shook hands and said good-bye to many, the policeman in charge repeated over and over again: "Let him go freely!" Needless to say, even the appearance of freedom was gone as it got nearer to 5 o'clock and finally the Immigration Officials and police hurried him through the departing gate.

Thus Steve Lavender became the third Christian missionary ordered to leave the country in less than 4 years. The authorities have said that the circumstances and the action taken in each case is different. However, it is apparent that the result is the same.

What follows is an attempt to record some of the facts and some of the impressions of events during the preceding month, and particularly during the last week of Steve Lavender's stay in Korea. Also in order to understand these events a bit of background is necessary. For some months, actually for some years the ROK Government, which now rules by decree and by the careful control of the flow of information, has found the urban-industrial mission programs (and some other church related mission activities as well) to be disturbing to the status quo and threatening to their declared objectives with respect to foreign investment and economic development. There have been numerous, rather clear indications that the authorities are seeking to curtail, if not to eliminate this kind of mission work.

For example, there have been many cases of interference in the attempts of the workers to organize and to elect their own leaders. In spite of flagrant violations of the Labor Standards Law, workers have been harrassed and mistreated. Some are frequently interrogated, and some have been arrested and put in prison when they have tried to speak out or to persuade owners and managers to observe the existing labor regulations. The UIM work and workers have frequently been labeled "communists." Most recently this was the case in two publications written by a Mr. Ji Young Hong--a former KCIA employee--which have been given wide distribution to industrial managers and to the workers as well as to ministers of the churches. And this has been done rather obviously with the consent of the Government. The UIM workers have been under close surveillance, they have frequently been interrogated, and like many of the workers who are in jail now, they too have gone to jail.

On May 1, the Rev. Myung Jin In, one of the workers of the Yong Dong Po Urban-Industrial Mission, was arrested and is in jail now awaiting trial. He is charged with a "violation" of the Presidential Decree No. 9 for having preached a sermon speaking critically of those who do evil and injustice, referring specifically to some verses in the book of Micah. He is also charged with refusing to comply with a Government request through the National Federation of Credit Unions for an audit of the Yong Dong Po Mission Credit Union. This was apparently a special and not a routine request as it did not apply to other credit unions at the same time, and it is reported to have been ordered by the KCIA. The UIM workers refused the audit with a view to protecting the names of the workers who are members of the Credit Union. Also during May, after confiscating records from the UIM Office, various taxes and fines were suddenly assessed totaling the equivalent of about \$40,000!

Early in May, before his residence permit was due to expire, Steve Lavender made application for an extension of that permit (he had in February been given a 3 month permit, and prior to that a 5th month permit) so that he might continue his mission work. It should be noted here that in July of 1977, also when his residence permit was being renewed, that Steve was called into the Immigration Office and given a warning (actually the only warning he ever got) concerning his writing a letter to friends and supporters in Australia and in other places telling of some particular problems with certain factories and workers. Steve asked all those who would to write letters either to the company--requesting back pay for the workers--and/or to the Director of the Office of Labor Affairs calling their attention to the problems. The Government authorities have construed this letter to be a call for a boycott of Korean manufactured goods which it was not deliberately intended to be. It should be noticed that Residence Permits are ordinarily given for one year, and sometimes longer; they have at times given permits for as long as 4 years.

After some days and no word from the Immigration Office, Steve began to wonder why action on his application for an extension of his residence permit was being delayed. At about this time (mid-May) an official notice (a 'kongmun') was received in the Office of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of Korea from the Minister of Culture and Information. This communication stated that it was a fact that Mr. Lavender was engaged in "political activities" in the midst of his missionary activity. The Church was asked whether they could guarantee his mission work in connection with the extension of his residence permit. The Church took this matter very seriously. They met with Steve two times to hear his views on the matter; they also investigated the matter and had discussions in 3 different committees at the General Assembly level. Then they responded to the Minister of Culture and Information (this Ministry bears responsibility for the registration and activity of religious organizations) by saying that "inasmuch as we are guaranteeing his mission work, we request that permission be given for continued residence." By this response the Church did not acknowledge the alleged "political activity." When inquiry was first made about the alleged "political activity" it was reported that Steve Lavender's involvement in the Pongnim Textile and the Namyong Nylon companies' labor disputes, including the letter mentioned above, were understood in this way.

By the end of May there was still no indication about the status of Steve Lavender's application for an extension of his residence permit. On May 31 at the regular meeting of the World Mission Cooperative Committee of the Presbyterian Church of Korea, which committee bears responsibility in the Church for the assignment and work of the approximately 90 missionaries, a full report was given about the alleged "political activity" and the communications with the Government about the same. Whereupon Mr. Lavender's assignment for the next year to the WIM work in Yong Dong Po was approved.

Almost two weeks later, on June 13, Steve Lavender received written notice, when he was called to the Immigration Office, that ordered him to leave Korea no later than June 17. Word of this notification to Steve spread quickly in the Korean churches and in the missionary community. Steve immediately notified his parents in Australia and some other persons abroad. He also notified the Australian Embassy in Seoul and requested their help and counsel. Steve also notified the General Secretary of the Presbyterian Church of Korea, the Rev. Kap Shik Sung. Rev. Sung almost immediately contacted some Government people seeking explanation and asking for a reconsideration of the matter. On Tuesday evening (the 13th) Mr. Sung visited the Immigration Office which is a section of the Ministry of Justice. Mr. Sung was told that the Immigration Office had recommended the extension upon receiving the guarantee and request of the Church via the Ministry of Culture and Information; but that apparently the decision had been made by the Minister of Justice himself.

On Wednesday morning Rev. Sung visited the Religious Affairs Section of the Ministry of Culture and Information, and was given some indication --verbally and in writing--of what the reasons for not extending the residence permit were. In addition to the involvement in the problems of workers at the Pongnim and the Namyong companies, participation in prayer meetings with workers, a trip with Korean colleagues to inquire into some labor problems at the Arirang Organ Co. near Taegu, and recently a letter to a West German church person reporting the circumstances of the arrest and imprisonment of Rev. In--these matters were cited as reasons or "political activities."

Rev. Sung conveyed some of these reasons to Steve Lavender in a meeting on Wednesday afternoon; he let Steve see the typed pages only briefly and Steve was able to make some hurried notes from the Korean, ~~all of which he did not understand~~. On Wednesday evening there was a meeting with missionary friends to share information and to discuss the situation. Some suggestions were made of alternatives for action, but it was clearly understood that Steve would make his own decision. Some people urged Steve to stay until "they made him leave." Others, including representatives of the Presbyterian Church of Korea, suggested that he go quietly. Government spokesmen contacted said that if he went quietly, and if the church invited him to come back that they would consider giving him a visa, after some months have passed. Many doubt that the Government would really do this.

Furthermore, there is the question of whether or not the church would invite him back and to what kind of work. Even though statements on policy for urban-industrial mission work have been made in two recent General Assemblies--within the reports of the Dept. of Evangelism--there is no clear consensus either with respect to policy or methods in this kind of mission work. The most generally accepted position is that preaching the Gospel in usual or traditional ways takes precedence over actions which try to deal with real problems which workers have. Others--probably a minority--feel that it is essential to preach or teach the Gospel in words, but also to show forth the love of Christ in deeds of helpfulness seeking to find solutions to some of the serious problems which the workers have. Thus, these persons are convinced, the preaching and the witness becomes credible or "believable." The Church has appointed a special committee to study the church's policy with respect to urban-industrial mission work. Presumably this committee may be prepared to make a report at the next General Assembly in September.

Steve Lavender received no indication in writing from the Immigration Office, or any other office of the Government as to why he had to leave, what violations of his visa status had actually occurred and how. Except for the information that was given to the General Secretary of the Presbyterian Church, indirectly through the Ministry of Culture and Information, nothing was given to Steve. Therefore on Thursday, June 15th, Steve directed a letter to the Minister of Justice requesting such information in writing. A copy of this letter was also given to the General Secretary of the Presbyterian Church. Also on Thursday Steve secured some legal counsel. It was pointed out that the Government did not really consider themselves obligated to give any reasons written or otherwise, and furthermore that there was really no regular process of appeal in a case where a person is applying for or requesting an extension of a residence permit.

Nevertheless, on Friday the 16th Steve prepared a personal letter of appeal, <sup>to the Minister of Justice</sup> asking him to reconsider the decision not to extend his residence permit. This letter, as well as the letter of the day before, were delivered directly to the Ministry of Justice. No acknowledgment <sup>point</sup> of the receipt of either communication was ever made. When an inquiry was made in a telephone conversation with the Immigration Office on Saturday morning, the reply was that the Government would not make any reply in writing.

Steve moved out of his apartment on Friday morning, and transferred his personal belonging to the UIM Office in Yong Dong Po. On Friday afternoon there was a meeting of a special urban-industrial advisory committee of the Dept. of Evangelism of the Presbyterian Church to review the whole situation and to make recommendation for action. It was decided that the Church would make one last effort by sending a delegation of four leading

churchmen to meet the Minister of Justice the following morning, if such a meeting could be arranged. This recommendation of the special committee was reported to Steve Lavender, along with some counsel that reinforced the idea that unless the order to leave was rescinded, Steve should probably go quietly. The church would be glad to invite him back and the Government has said they would consider giving him a visa at a later date. Even if he could not come back to urban-industrial mission work in Yong Dong Po, there was similar work in other places and certainly many other kinds of evangelistic work in which he might be involved. Steve gave no indication of his interest in other kinds of work. Besides a lot would depend on the results of the present study of urban-industrial mission policy and practice by ministers related to the Presbyterian Church of Korea. The Minister of Justice was not available for a meeting on Saturday morning.

On Friday evening there was a meeting with workers and staff at the UIM office and meeting place in Yong Dong Po. From early Saturday morning there were some missionary friends with Steve at the UIM office. By 2 o'clock in the afternoon about 12 or 15 missionary friends gathered at the office for a worship service in which many made contributions with verses of Scripture, a contemporary reading and prayer. Afterwards the group listened to a sermon on tape which Steve had received from his parents the day before.

Until sometime after 3 o'clock on Saturday afternoon Steve had not yet made up his mind to go, or to stay. In various ways the group made it known to Steve that we would support him in whatever decision he might make. Steve had made no airline reservation and had no ticket. The day before the Immigration authorities had offered to help him make these arrangements, and he had told them that he would call if he needed their help. By 3:30 Steve made his own decision to go. This was relayed to the Immigration authorities through the Presbyterian Church office. No direct call came to Steve telling him when to go to the airport, but indirectly--again through the Church office--Steve was told that arrangements would be made at the airport, and that he should go directly there. By 4:15 or 4:20 p.m. Steve had arrived at the Kimpo Airport in the company of missionary friends.

There was a few minutes of waiting, and then Steve and some of his missionary friends were escorted to the KAL ticket office. The KAL flight to Osaka was not until 6:30. Steve indicated his preference to take the JAL flight which left at 5 p.m. All of the JAL passengers had been checked through the baggage section. Steve was escorted by Immigration officials and plain clothes police to the baggage counter where a ticket was prepared on order. Steve paid for the ticket with travelers checks which he had with him. His bag was gone through thoroughly and questions raised about some of the books and papers which he was carrying out. Following the inspection there was no indication that anything was kept by the authorities; however there was no way to lock the bag as it was apparently checked through to Osaka. There was a move to take Steve up a stairway at the side of the baggage room, but then in the company of Immigration officials, plain clothes police and missionary friends a way was cleared diagonally across the baggage room, up another flight of stairs and to the departing passenger lounge. Within just a few minutes Steve said his good-bys and was escorted through the departing passenger gate. Though his anticipated term of 3 years was cut short by decision of the Government, there is real and satisfying sense that Steve did what he came to Korea to do. His deeds of love and kindness in behalf of the poor and oppressed with whom he came into contact through the Yong Dong Po Industrial Mission program were consistent with the faith which he has in Jesus Christ. What he has done in his coming, in his serving and his going will not soon be forgotten by the workers or by the missionary friends that he leaves behind. (6/25/78)