

TAIWAN: BATTERING THE OPPOSITION

Even though he had dramatically altered his face by plastic surgery, firebrand activist Shih Ming-teh did not have a chance. An islandwide manhunt—spurred on by a \$70,000 reward—finally caught up with him last week when Taiwan police hauled the former political prisoner off to jail once again. His arrest was the climax of one of the biggest political crackdowns on Taiwan in years. Since an anti-Kuomintang rally turned into a riot last month, injuring nearly 200 policemen, security forces have rounded up almost every major opposition politician—65 people in all, including Shih's plastic surgeon. They shut down all important critical publications and even arrested a Presbyterian minister in mid-sermon. "The opposition movement has been demolished," said Shih's American wife, Linda Gail Arrigo, shortly after his capture. "I believe my husband has been sentenced to death, and maybe already executed."

By Western standards, the opposition platform was hardly inflammatory. Its planks included the right to form a new party in formal opposition to the ruling Kuomintang, freedom of expression and assembly and an end to martial law. What officials most disliked were opposition proposals to jettison the fiction that Taipei's leadership represents all of China—or even all of Taiwan. Many opposition members, including 39-year-old Shih, are native-born Taiwanese who strongly object to a central government top-heavy with mainland-born

elders. The suggestion from some opposition leaders that Taiwan become a separate country was equally offensive to the ruling party, although both China and the U.S. also would oppose independence for Taiwan.

PRIMITIVE POLITICS: The current crackdown may push the battered opposition toward more radical tactics. Sentences for opposition leaders arrested after the Human Rights Day rally are expected to be at least fifteen years. "The message is clear," said Arrigo, who was deported from Taiwan shortly after the December riot. "Elections and speech-making go nowhere. The alternative is passive resistance, underground organization and terrorism." The government response is also a setback to Taipei's policy of gradual political liberalization, and a blot on its undeniably impressive economic record. "Since the dark days of the 1940s and 1950s, the Kuomintang had increasingly shown respect for human rights, though the record was never unblemished," said James Seymour, of the Society for Protection of East Asians' Human Rights. "But now the situation has reverted to a most primitive form of politics."

For the shattered remnants of Taiwan's opposition movement, there are other disturbing portents of dark days to come. In November, Shih Ming-teh visited Green Island in southern Taiwan, where he had spent part of a fifteen-year prison term on sedition charges. There he discovered that the Taiwan Garrison Command was building yet another jail—apparently for yet another influx of political prisoners.

MELINDA LIU with bureau reports



Taiwan demonstrators attacking military and police, captured dissident

Shih: Back to the dark days

