

# JIMMY LAI “FOUND” GUILTY

Catholic human rights champion, Jimmy Lai, has been “found” guilty by a three-judge Hong Kong court— there was no jury—of conspiring to endanger national security and conspiracy to publish seditious articles. The 78-year old journalist and businessman had spent over four years in solitary confinement for “destabilizing” the ruling party.

Judge Esther Toh said, “There is no doubt” that Lai “had harbored his resentment and hatred of China for many of his adult years.” Wrong. His resentment and hatred were aimed at the Communist Party, not the country or its people.

The Beijing-led crackdown on protests in 2019 against the Hong Kong regime was criticized by the now defunct *Apple Daily* newspaper, founded by Lai in 1995; ever since he has been in the crosshairs of the Communist Party. His participation in the Tiananmen Square vigil in 2020—to commemorate the freedom fighters who died there in 1989— also angered the Communists.

Beh Lih Yi, the Asia-Pacific director of the Committee to Protect Journalism, said the verdict was a “sham conviction,” a sentiment echoed by many international human rights organizations. Lai had been nominated for a Noble Peace Prize several times.

There was no way Lai was going to be found innocent. What sealed his fate began years ago when the Chinese Communists took control of Hong Kong in 1997. They promised civil liberties for 50 years, but only someone hopelessly naïve was inclined to believe them. After all, this is the same political party that had murdered tens of millions of its own people under Mao Zedong. They do not take kindly to dissent.

Lai converted to Catholicism in 1997 and was baptized by Cardinal Joseph Zen. The Chinese prelate, who was at the courthouse, has been very critical of the Catholic Church’s

response to the plight of Catholics in China, saving his harshest comments for Pope Francis. Zen has stood by Lai for many years.

*Wall Street Journal* journalist Bill McGurn, who is godfather to Lai, has called the Vatican's approach a "disaster." Similarly, Benjamin Rogers, co-founder of Hong Kong Watch, accused Pope Francis of turning a blind eye to what is going on in China. He maintains that the leader of China, Xi Jinping, "wants the Catholic Church to kowtow to the Marxist-Leninist Chinese Communist Party regime."

In October, Pope Leo XIV greeted Lai's wife and daughter after the general audience in St. Peter's Square, but it is not known if the new pope is planning to make a public statement about this matter.

While in custody, Lai was routinely denied the Eucharist. But nothing broke his will. He once told the judges that "[At] the end of the day, the truth will come out in the kingdom of heaven, in the kingdom of God, and that's good enough for me."

Keep Jimmy Lai in your prayers. He is not in good health and will be sentenced January 12. He faces life imprisonment.