

Chinese activists receive 13-year prison terms



BEIJING (AP) — Two longtime democracy activists were sentenced Tuesday to 13 years in prison, apparently receiving the most severe punishment yet stemming from the 1989 Tiananmen Square protests.

The court gave a six-year sentence to a third man convicted of sedition and released a fourth who it said was guilty but repented.

Wang Juntao, a 33-year-old newspaper editor, and Chen Ziming, 38, the head of a private social science research institute, received the 13-year prison terms after being convicted of sedition.

Robin Munro, a researcher for the human rights group Asia Watch, said authorities were seeking to make the two the scapegoats for the 1989 democracy movement, which drew millions of protesters into the streets of cities nationwide.

"They said there was a conspiracy. By their own logic they had to produce scapegoats and conspirators," Munro said.

Sources close to the two men's families said Chen asked the court to investigate alleged tampering with documents and tapes used against him, but his petition was turned down.

They said the judges in both trials also refused to let the defense attorneys present new information that showed their clients' innocence, and repeatedly interrupted Chen and Wang when they tried to defend themselves.

Asked about the sentences, State Department spokeswoman Margaret Tutwiler said the Bush administration finds them "deeply troubling."

"No prison sentence imposed for non-violent activity could be considered lenient," she said.

"The speed of the verdicts, the limited opportunity afforded defendants to prepare a defense and the inability of independent observers to attend the trials inevitably raises questions of justice, fairness and due process."

She said China denied permission for U.S. Embas-

sy personnel to observe the trials.

The sentences were revealed one hour after the court finished hearing evidence in Wang's case and less than an hour after it finished hearing Chen's.

"Obviously the sentences had already been decided," a friend of the two activists said on condition of anonymity.

Chen and Wang also were convicted of counter-revolutionary propaganda and incitement, which covers any statement considered harmful to the communist revolution. The official Xinhua News Agency said the two have "shown no willingness to repent."

Liu Gang, 30, a researcher at Chen's institute who helped organize student protesters, was given a six-year term because he "acknowledged his crimes and showed willingness to repent," Xinhua said.

Many ordinary people who took part in the protests also remain under investigation either at home or in jail.

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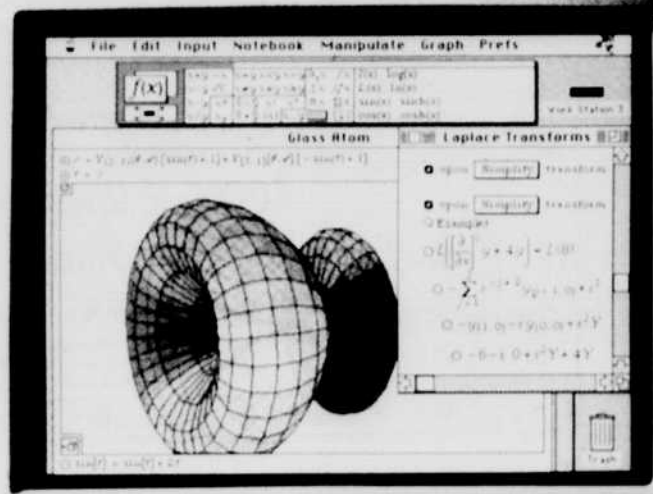
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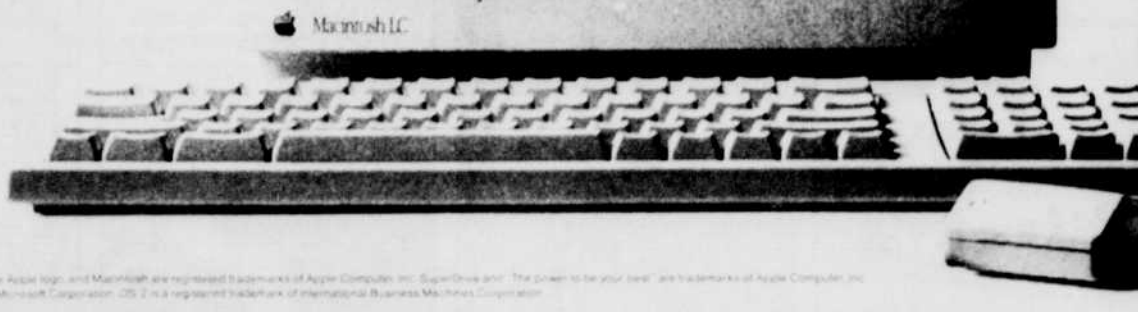
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