

Further Comment – Chen Inquiry

By Senator Bob Brown

The overall picture presented to this committee is one of largely unchecked surveillance and, at times, harassment of Australian citizens in Australia by agents of the Peoples Republic of China. The Australian government is not responding to this unacceptable intrusion of a foreign government into the domestic life and freedoms of our country.

A case in point is Chen Yonglin's defection. Like the two former police officials of China who appeared before the committee, this courageous man expected safe harbour, if not an open-arms welcome, in Australia. He, and they, did not get it.

While the Committee is unable to prove who was responsible for the failure of the Department of Immigration to ensure Mr Chen's defection was not notified to Beijing, the matter may have been resolved by requiring the two secretaries who dealt directly with him on 26th May in Sydney, to appear. However, the lackadaisical attitude of senior officer O'Callaghan to Mr Chen's presence and urgent entreaty in his premises is inexcusable.

The consequent failure of the Minister for Foreign Affairs to accept Mr Chen's plea for asylum, and to promptly notify Mr Chen, disregarded Mr Chen's and the nation's best interests. This failure was compounded by Mr Downer's breach of Australian law when he spoke with China's Ambassador Fu about Mr Chen on 2 June 2005.

The evidence before the Committee leads to the conclusion that the Australian Government considers that its political relationship with the Chinese government is more important than the political, religious and human rights of individuals in both countries.



Senator Bob Brown

