

TRANSCRIPT OF THE TIBET CONNECTION INTERVIEW WITH LEX PELGER—
A 25 YEAR OLD AMERICAN WRITER WHO JOINED THE HUNGER STRIKE ON
THE MARCH TO TIBET

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thetibetconnection.org

THE TIBET CONNECTION: Lex, I know that at Sarah the other day, they were issued with orders of detention...

PELGER: Yeah

TTC: ...saying that they were not allowed to leave Kangra district

PELGER: About fifty police officers stopped the march at the Kangra district line

TTC: And can you tell me what the scene was like?

PELGER: We saw the police in the distance, and the march approached them, and 100 monks sat down directly in front of them in two rows. The support marchers sat behind them. Tenzin Tsundue was taken in a separate vehicle. I heard that it took eight police officers to get him into that vehicle. I believe he passively resisted like a Banshee. Then police started hauling away the marchers. The marchers clung to each other very tightly and passive resisted very strongly, and often it would take five, six police officers to get one monks into the buses that were there to take away all of the marchers.

TTC: When you say that they passively resisted, can you describe that?

PELGER: Most of the marchers spread themselves out or clung to each other, forcing the police to separate them and then bodily carry them to the car. A number of monks resisted by planting their feet against any objects that they could and getting them into the police bus was very difficult. One of the women arrested rolled herself under the bus and clung underneath there and it took very many men to bring her out. It took quite a long time to get all 100 monks and the eight foreigners into the police van.

TTC: How many foreigners were traveling with the marchers?

PELGER: I believe, including media, there were twenty foreigners.

TTC: And you said that eight foreigners were also put on the bus and taken away. Were you one of those?

PELGER: Yes.

TTC: What happened to you then?

PELGER: We rode about ten minutes in the bus, the monks praying and singing the entire time, and waving a Tibetan flag out the window, and we arrived at the police station. The monks passively walked out of the bus and into the police station, and two of the foreigners, myself included, held hands with them and also went into the cells, the detention cells where the monks are being held.

TTC: You said the foreigners weren't formally arrested, so did you *choose* to go with the monks?

PELGER: I chose to stay with the marchers because I knew that if the situation was reversed, and we were fighting for the liberation of America, that these men who were the bravest soldiers, I believe, because instead of using violence they used the much harder path of non-violent resistance, I believe that they would stick by me if I was getting arrested for trying to liberate America.

TTC: Lex, you're in a foreign country, you don't know what's going to happen to you. Were you frightened at all of what might happen?

PELGER: No. For one, I really believe the police here sympathize with us. They saw the Gandhian non-violence and I think it resonated with them. Also, I knew as an American that I had a very strong embassy to back me up. No matter what happens, there'll be Americans there fighting to make sure I get decent treatment. I cannot imagine what it's like for the Tibetans who have nobody to fight for them. They were planning to march into Tibet; right into the arms of the Chinese, facing imprisonment or death, and they have nobody to watch out for them.

TTC: So from the time you went into the cells with the monks, what happened from then?

PELGER: As we got into the cell, all the monks sat around the outside. They started singing hymns, they sang songs of protest, there were tears in many, many eyes, but they all looked so determined to keep on going. And their complete lack of knowledge of what might happen next; would they be released soon, will they be in jail now for a few weeks or months, will they be able to continue this march to their homeland? They had no idea, but they just sat there and looked brave as hell.

TTC: What happened to you then?

PELGER: The police kept coming in and telling me that I should leave, that I'm not under arrest. One of the organizers from the outside came in and told me to follow her, and then I was taken upstairs and just released. I stood outside the prison for a while getting more and more frustrated at having to abandon these brave men, and eventually when the cops weren't really paying attention, I sprinted past them and then down into the jail. They started trying to pull me away and actually got my shirt off. But I managed

to get one hand into the cell, and then those Tibetans pulled like hell and I was inside—back among the guys.

TTC: So you essentially broke into jail.

PELGER: Er...yes. Soon after I got into the cell the leader stood up and came over to me and told me in English that we're starting a hunger strike, and after I got outside, I also saw that the foreigners are camping outside the door to the prison and are also staging a hunger strike. There are, I believe, ten protestors out there now, with signs and Tibetan flags.

TTC: What countries are they from?

PELGER: A Belgian, a German, and English girl, a bunch of Americans and a guy from Australia—mostly young people under 25. There's a few college students who are taking a semester off to travel here or who are studying here. Most were in Dharamsala anyway for the Dalai Lama's teaching before the march began.

TTC: How long do the marchers and the support foreigners outside plan on maintaining this hunger strike?

PELGER: Until they get free and are able to keep going marching towards Tibet.

TTC: What's the feeling there? What's the morale among the marchers and the support people outside the jail?

PELGER: The foreigners outside are singing songs and trying to tell everyone in earshot about what's going on here.

TTC: What songs are they singing?

PELGER: Give peace a chance, a bunch of Bob Marley. There's about three songs between them I think. *[LAUGHTER]*

[HEAR PEOPLE SINGING: SOMETIMES I FEEL LIKE A MOTHERLESS CHILD, A LONG LONG WAY FROM MY HOME...IN TIBET]

TTC: They don't sound that bad.

PELGER: Bob Marley's what they play over and over again, so it's almost like a hit radio song here.

TTC: Okay, Lex Pelger, thanks so much for talking to us. Stay safe, we'll talk to you later.

PELGER: All right, sounds good. Thanks a lot.

