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QUARTERLY JOURNAL OF AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL
No. 7. August 1965

12 CRANE COURT, LONDON E.C.4. CITY 6633

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BATTEN DOWN THE HATCHES . . . STORMY SEAS AHEAD

THE United Nations, the Common Market, N.A.T.O., the Afro-Asian Conference . . . this is only the head of a long list of international bodies this year reduced to that state which De Gaulle describes so graphically as "*point morte*". More serious still, the wheels of international trade exchange are running dangerously short of oil; the machinery may seize up at any moment.

In the prevailing state of disarray and confusion each Government is trying to shore up its military and economic defences. The world is moving back to the period of confusion which it experienced during the late 1930's. It would be unrealistic to deny that the end of the chaos may be World War. But history does not automatically repeat itself, and those who believe that it does are dictators' dupes, for all tyrants excuse themselves by quoting the inevitability of history. What this period does already involve is a dangerous increase of competing nationalism. The structure of the nation-state has stood up to the test of war, as has the family. During periods of insecurity people retreat back both into state and family. Snobbery and nationalism are social diseases which prey on frightened bodies.

The prospect of any international judicial machinery to guarantee human rights is now more remote than at any time since the United Nations was brought into being 20 years ago. It will take a concentrated effort to sustain in being the rudimentary regional machinery which already exists. One real contribution which can be made by AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL supporters is to back up, publicise and endeavour to extend the influence of the Human Rights Commissions of the Council of Europe and the Organisation of American States.

For the rest, like the Governments of the various countries in which we live the AMNESTY movement must batten down the hatches of the ship. We are sailing into heavy seas. Any move-

ment which proclaims loyalty to an ideal higher than the state is today threatened with attack, and perhaps tomorrow with persecution. Up till now those of us who have lived in free countries have been trying to help our fellow human beings deprived of freedom by military or one-party rule. Now we ourselves are suddenly abused at home by a new trend of opinion which condemns those dedicated to supranationalism as "good-for-nothings", quoting De Gaulle's sharp language a second time. Four years ago when this movement started the wind was blowing behind our sails; now it is in our face, and we should recognise the fact.

More than ever . . . individual cases

If we allow ourselves to degenerate into a movement that only passes resolutions, holds meetings and publishes bulletins, we may be torn apart by internal dissension even before governments dignify us by their attacks. The one hope of sailing AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL safely through the present troubled seas is by devoting our energies more than ever to work on individual cases. Provided that we understand that we are a specialised agency for the protection of civilians under totalitarian governments, we have the same prospect of survival as the International Red Cross or the World Health Organisation. Once let ourselves become a debating society and we are doomed.

There is, however, one subject of legitimate debate; that is about which categories of civilians we are prepared to protect and what steps we should take to help them. We have, for example, always admitted the right of a Government to detain individuals during a temporary but genuine national emergency. What if the threat of World War produces a general state of emergency throughout most of the world? Can there ever be valid reasons for imprisoning a person who advocates a negotiated peace? If the answer to

this is No, should we also protect the man who is arrested for favouring secession or dismemberment of a state? Would we have assisted the Sudeten Germans arrested by the Czechs in 1937/38?

Never in our brief history has the existence of AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL been more important. We are the only organisation open to all people who believe in individual freedom that transcends national and ideological frontiers. Our work may become relatively less successful, our own position more difficult; in this we are in the noble company of the United Nations itself. What matters is to keep the ship sailing even though all the sails have to be taken down. The time will come when the wind will veer; then we will be able to hoist sails again. At the first favourable moment let us seize the initiative to establish an effective supranational police force strong enough to deter any government or other authority from interrupting free expression or free worship.

1965 INTERNATIONAL ASSEMBLY

ARRANGEMENTS are now going ahead for this year's International Assembly to be held in the Netherlands over the week-end of 25th/26th September at "Op Gouden Wieken" conference centre near Scheveningen.

So far nine of the countries where there are groups established have confirmed that they will be sending their full complement of two delegates. All the remaining countries that wish to send delegates to the Assembly are asked to notify the International Secretariat *as soon as possible*.

A number of organisations in the human rights field, including the Belgian League for the Rights of Man, War Resisters' International, the World Veterans Federation, COSEC, the World Assembly of Youth, the Council of Europe, International P.E.N. and the Ligue Internationale contre l'Antisémitisme et le Racisme, have accepted the invitation to send observers to the Assembly and several other international organisations have expressed the hope that they will be able to arrange for representatives to be present.

Although it is only possible to accommodate the two voting delegates from each country at "Op Gouden Wieken" there are numerous hotels near the conference centre and it is hoped that as many members as possible will take the opportunity to be present at the Assembly. ALL members wishing to attend the Assembly must notify the International Secretariat not later than 1st September. Copies of the preliminary agenda have been sent out to all the groups but individual members who would be interested in having copies can obtain them from Head Office.

All groups are reminded that resolutions for the agenda should have been in by 1st August.

However, it is still possible for groups to send in resolutions, but they must reach the International Secretariat by 1st September.

RELEASED EAST GERMAN PRISONER'S REPORT

AT the Annual General Meeting of the Irish Section on 22nd June, the guest speaker was Peter Herrmann, formerly adopted by an Irish group, who was released in 1964 after serving six and a half years of a 14-year sentence, in East Germany. He now lives in West Berlin. The following is a shortened version of his address which he prepared in English.

"I want to thank you again for the help of the Irish Section given to me in my time of imprisonment. Some favours granted to me by the prison director became easier to understand when I heard of your efforts after my release. For instance, I was the first prisoner who was allowed to leave the prison, though strongly guarded, for one day when my mother was on her death bed.

"I was the oldest member of our group, being 23 years of age, when sentenced in 1958. Our group never performed any acts of violence nor did we prepare them. We only discussed the possibilities of violence but we rejected them ourselves. We produced leaflets in order to stimulate passive resistance. The contents of these leaflets, however, were not mentioned at our trial.

"After 1960 imprisonment in the Soviet Zone was made easier in some respects. The prisoners were given certain rights. Information given to the police by stoolpigeons was checked and not simply accepted as the truth as in former years.

"Espionage"

"Most of the sentences pronounced are against 'incitement' and against flight or assistance of flight from the Zone. You can be punished for 'incitement' for telling jokes about Ulbricht. I have met people who for that reason were given three years' imprisonment. I want to add something on what is meant by espionage and transmission of intelligence in the Soviet Zone. The term 'espionage' has been widened to the extent that everyone who tells facts about the Soviet Zone economy and everyday life can be accused of espionage. This applies to every refugee who had a job in a state-run industry. Or let us take the case of someone who wants to record on tape the discussion of a public meeting and tries to send it to a friend in Western Germany. He will be punished even if he has no contact with any Western organisation. All the members of the Social Democratic Party, which no longer exists in the Soviet Zone, who kept in contact with their party in Western Germany were punished because of espionage.

"My friends have asked me to tell you that

among those punished for espionage there are many prisoners of conscience. I myself came from a place where people have experienced for decades how logic and reason seemed to become inefficient next to the overwhelming force of a dictatorial power animated by a pseudo-scientific ideology. . . . It is not surprising that many people in these countries think that only power can oppose power. And the young people no longer see freedom of thought as something intrinsically of value. They have simply done without it for too long. And yet I want to tell you from experience that commonsense arguments will have a certain positive effect on many people, even on those whom I have to regard as my political enemies. . . . I want to encourage you in your future work. Everyone ought to realise that your aims are in his personal interest as well. May the Irish people be always conscious of the priceless treasure of free speech."

THE DOLOR OF THE DESTITUTE

HUGH VODDEN, *voluntary social worker, examines the Rhodesian Government's provisions for destitute Africans*

IT is the opinion of the writer of this article that restriction as now implemented by the Southern Rhodesian Government is not the kind of restriction which Parliament envisaged when it passed the Law and Order (Maintenance) Act. The reason for this statement is that the restrictee's way of life is so circumscribed as to make it impossible for him to earn a living in the normal way—indeed impossible to earn a living at all. Thus restrictees, and consequently their families, are made indigent by Government action, but Government acknowledges no greater degree of responsibility toward these people than towards those destitute through unemployment or downright laziness.

Yet this is the present situation. Restrictees' families are treated as all other destitutes. On 19th February, 1965, the Minister of Labour and Social Welfare said in the Legislative Assembly: "Applications by the dependants of restrictees for public assistance are examined and dealt with in exactly the same way as applications from other destitute persons." What provision does Government make for African destitutes? In a letter of 20th June, 1964, the Minister of Law and Order wrote: "The position in so far as public assistance is concerned is quite clear. It is: (a) Basic assistance means the *provision of food and shelter*. . . ." Speaking in Parliament on 19th February, 1965, the Minister of Labour and Social Welfare said, "Responsibility for destitute persons is shared by Government, local authorities and voluntary organisations. Central Government accepts responsibility for *making a contribution towards the basic needs of food and shelter*."

Although the Ministers disagree as to the degree of responsibility they must assume, two words are common to their statements . . . Food and Shelter. Let us look at these two a little more closely. In the month of February, 1965, in the Government Township of Highfield 480 families received food rations in kind from the Social Welfare Department, and approximately 55 families received an allowance towards the provision of shelter. The approximate cost of this aid to central government would be about £2,000. But before the reader assumes that this is munificence we will set out the conditions that must prevail before such help is given. To receive help of any kind a family must be in receipt of an income of *less* than the cost of the rent, plus 10s. per person in the family per month. (Until recently the assessment quite arbitrarily assumed the rental cost as 29s. whereas in fact some rents are as high as £6.) The 10s. per person is considered to be the basic requirement for food—what can one eat for 4d. a day?

Below This Level

An African family has to be subsisting below this level before it qualifies for help. Then and only then a family of mother and four or more children receives a food pack in kind worth approximately £5, and one worth about £2 10s. if there are less than four children, each month. (It is interesting to note that a family receiving the larger food pack may well be eating better than a family that does not qualify for any help at all. Such is the wonder of the system.) Twenty-nine shillings might also be given direct to the housing authority towards the cost of the family rent, but this is the exception and not the rule as can be seen from the earlier figures. The housing authority can, too, refuse to accept this allowance, as is the case in the township of Mufakose, on the grounds that it is only part payment of the monthly rent. The average African rent in the Salisbury townships is around £3 10s. per month so that even given the 29s. per month, where on earth does a destitute find the balance of £2 1s. per month? If these families could move into houses with cheaper rents then there would be no great problem. But the pressure on housing in the Salisbury area is so immense as to rule out this possibility. The Director of African Administration, in his annual report, states that there are over 5,000 families requiring accommodation, and that there are literally hundreds who have been on the waiting list since 1949. In the Municipal townships no great debts accrue since eviction follows swiftly on the failure to pay rent. In Highfield, however, this is not the case and families run up enormous rental arrears, sometimes to the tune of £50 or more. This means a heartbreaking task for the unemployed once he finds a job, or in the case of the Government-forced unemployed, restrictees and detainees, once the man is released.

At all points the efforts of the Social Welfare Department are supplemented by the work of voluntary organisations, in first aid help before the machinery of the Department can be brought to bear on a situation; with fuel, food, clothing; and even help with the rent to avoid the eviction of such families from their homes. It is the conviction of the writer that the Government is wrong not only morally, but politically as well. In doing so little to help these families, rendered destitute by the Government's methods of dealing with the "nationalist menace", the Government itself irritates "the menace" by raising the level of bitterness in the country. The voluntary organisations in their efforts to alleviate the suffering of these people keep down the level of bitterness, and thus help to avoid the possibility of a spontaneous outbreak of violence.

STUDENT ARRESTS IN IRAN

THE arrest in Tehran of six young Persians—five of them graduates of British universities—on charges of being involved in or having knowledge of the attempt against the Shah's life in April caused widespread concern inside and outside Persia.

The attempt, which took place on 10th April and which involved Reza Shamsabadi, a conscript on duty at the Marble Palace, the Shah's city residence, was, according to the authorities, planned by Ahmad Mansuri, an electrical engineering graduate of Manchester, and a Persian radio mechanic, Shmad Kamrani, who was alleged to have been the contact between Shamsabadi and Mansuri.

The Persian government alleged that four others were party to the idea of the assassination attempt though they finally voted against going ahead with it, viz. Parviz Nikkhah, Mansur Purkashani, Firuz Shirvanlu and Mohsen Rassuli.

As soon as the six were arrested, towards the end of April, widespread scepticism was voiced by their friends abroad and by others who were aware of the degree of limitation placed on political liberty in Persia about the charges. The scepticism was not dispelled and was even increased when the Government published a confession said to have been made by Nikkhah in which he said the group was preparing guerrilla warfare on Chinese lines.

After the dispatch of a letter of protest by Lord Brockway and 49 Labour Members of the House of Commons to Mr. Hoveida, the Persian Prime Minister, AMNESTY decided to make inquiries into the case.

Reports from the Persian capital which have reached Crane Court suggest that in fact few thinking people in Tehran believe the government's story about the students. The link between

the five highly educated young men and the conscript seem to be shadowy in the extreme. The authorities have not been able to reveal how the young men would have hoped to take advantage of the death of the Shah.

It is widely suggested in Tehran, the reports say, that the arrest of the six is an attempt to minimise any speculation about disaffection within the Imperial Guard and to frighten into silence those Persian students abroad whose protests against the Shah's regime have become more and more strident in recent years.

But, to give the Government its due, it appears that allegations made outside the country by Communist radio stations and others that the students had been grossly maltreated were exaggerated if not wholly misplaced. Nikkhah, who was said to have died under torture is known to be alive and well. His parents made a second visit to him in the prison of Ghazel-Galeh at the end of June and found him cheerful. They were allowed to send him fruit (he said his regular diet needed little supplementing), clothes and books. He was arrested with a month's salary on him which he has been allowed to retain. A similar report has been received about another young student under arrest.

The question remains as to what the government, or rather the Shah who will eventually direct how the prisoners will be treated, is to do with them. No one in Tehran appears willing to make any firm prognostication. Some suggest that the government is on the horns of a dilemma. As they are innocent, the argument runs, the government cannot afford to give them an open trial, yet it cannot in face of the widespread international preoccupation with their fate afford to try them in secret. They might therefore just be quietly released.

Whether this interpretation is true remains to be seen. Meanwhile the students' case will be helped if the largest number of people outside Persia make it known to the Shah that they are following it with concern. As proof of this comes the report that one Commonwealth diplomat in Tehran expressed the opinion that the Brockway letter had saved the life of at least one of the detainees.

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