

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL NEWSLETTER

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IMPORTANT NOTICE

Dr. John KAREFA SMART - SIERRA LEONE

Unconfirmed reports state that Dr. Karefa Smart was one of the 29 UDP leaders released from detention in Freetown on 25th February.

This report was received after the compilation of the March newsletter; there is therefore now no need to send postcards appealing for his release.

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MISSIONS

East Africa: John Humphreys, Amnesty staff member responsible for research on Africa, has just completed a mission to Tanzania, Ethiopia and Uganda, where he has had talks with representatives of the O.A.U. (Organisation for African Unity) and government officials. A more detailed report will be included in the April newsletter.

Egypt: Dr. Rudolf Peters, lecturer in Islamic Law at the University of Amsterdam, went to Egypt in January to investigate possibilities for the release of Mr. Sayyid Ahmed Loutfi, A broadcaster and journalist, Mr. Loutfi was sentenced to life imprisonment in 1959 for anti-Nasser propaganda.

South East Asia: Miss Estrella Carreras has returned from her mission to South East Asia and is now writing a report on it for the Secretariat.

Czechoslovakia: Mr. Asbjørn Eida, a lecturer at the Faculty of Law of Oslo University, arrived in Prague on 18 February to observe a trial scheduled for that date. The trial, of some young Czechs detained in Prague for over a year, had been postponed many times and on arrival Mr. Eida was informed that the trial had been postponed again until 1 March. The detainees were members of a small political group, the "Movement of Revolutionary Youth" and the charges are believed to be "agitation" and plotting to overthrow the republic - although there is no evidence to suggest they advocated violence. It is hoped that another observer will attend on 1 March and intercede on behalf of Mr. Vladimir Skutina, a television commentator sentenced to two years' imprisonment who is said to be seriously ill.

ORGANISATION

Chronicle of Current Events: The Chronicle of Current Events is the major periodical of the movement for the protection of civil rights in the U.S.S.R. The Soviet civil rights movement is neither centrally organised nor in any general sense anti-Soviet but concerns itself mainly with the difficulties of Soviet citizens detained for asserting the rights of freedom of expression and assembly guaranteed by the Constitution of the U.S.S.R. A dispassionate and accurate document, the Chronicle has a wide unofficial circulation in the Soviet Union. It has now been appearing for nearly three years at approximately two-monthly intervals and contains unique information on political trials, political prisoners, the labour camps and the samizdat (typescript) publications. For the past eight months, Amnesty International has been duplicating an English translation of the Chronicle and sending it to those Amnesty groups which have adopted prisoners in the Soviet Union. Arrangements have now been made for printing the translation for a wider circulation, starting with issue no. 16 which is now available. Amnesty members will be charged £3 a year and other subscribers £3.50 (\$10) including airmail postage. The Chronicle will appear six times a year, and the text for one year will run to some 220-300 pages in all. In order to carry out this project about 1,000 subscriptions are needed. Amnesty members could assist by asking local libraries and universities whether they would like to take out subscriptions. A printed leaflet is available for publicity and subscription purposes.

International Executive Committee: The next meeting of the International Executive Committee will be on 20 and 21 March. Among the subjects on the agenda will be Spain, Israel, U.S.S.R. and Brazil. Consideration will also be given to a campaign against the growing use of torture and there will be a detailed examination of the theme for prisoner of conscience week. At its last meeting the Executive decided to restrict the number of items on the agenda in order to permit full discussion of important issues.

Sharpeville Day: Sharpeville Day is commemorated on 21 March and is designated as the U.N. Day to Combat Racialism and Racial Discrimination. Some national sections are planning campaigns for this day, related to prisoners detained because of their ethnic origin, colour or language.

International Secretariat, Turnagain Lane, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4. Telephone 01-236 0111/3

Postal Strike: The postal strike in Britain has prevented the International Secretariat from receiving any letters from groups for the past few weeks. Overseas visitors to the Secretariat have taken letters for posting but the accumulation of correspondence will inevitably cause delays once the strike has been settled.

Amnesty International Newsletter: The International Secretariat would appreciate information on publicity given to the Newsletter and its contents. It would be useful to know which newspapers are receiving it regularly from groups, national sections or press officers and what response there has been so far.

Vietnam: Groups with Vietnamese prisoners should note that the new address for both the Overseas Vietnamese Buddhist Association and the Vietnamese Buddhist Peace Delegation to Paris is 11, rue de la Goutte d'Or, Paris 18, France.

COUNTRIES

Mexico: On 28 January Professor Eli de Gortari -- one of Amnesty's adopted Mexican prisoners -- telephoned Amnesty International from Mexico to say that he and 16 others had just been released from Lecumberri Prison. The releases came as a result of a decision by the State Prosecution to drop a number of the charges against each of them, despite the fact that they had already been sentenced to prison terms ranging from 3 to 17 years. The seventeen prisoners, all detained for their involvement with the student movement of 1968, are free "conditionally" (bajo protesta). They are restricted to the Federal District and must report weekly to the authorities pending review of their cases. Ten other prisoners were freed in the same way at the end of December 1970. Amnesty had appealed to President Echeverria to grant an amnesty for the students, professors, journalists and trade unionists who have been held in Lecumberri for over two years. It is now hoped that the remaining prisoners will be freed and that the restrictions on those released will be lifted.

Greece: Since 1967 Amnesty International has sent approximately £30,000 worth of aid to Greece. According to lists received, 546 families are being given financial aid, apart from food parcels sent to prisoners. Facilities for the International Committee of the Red Cross were withdrawn by the authorities in 1970 and as a result Amnesty is now the only international organisation working in Greece. The relief programme carried out through Amnesty is distinct from the normal Amnesty work but attempts are being made to co-ordinate the two so that financial help can be spread as far as possible. The people on our lists do not receive assistance from any other source and without Amnesty's help might well be left with no income at all. Many of them, particularly the ordinary workers and villagers, have already suffered years of uncertainty and setbacks because of their political beliefs and they have no resources of their own. Unfortunately the problems do not end with the prisoner's release, since the chances of their finding employment are almost non-existent in the present situation in Greece. At the moment the Secretariat has lists of more than 200 families for whom more money is needed. In May 1970 Amnesty asked the Council of Europe to set up a relief fund but this has not yet been done. The main contribution to our central relief work has come to Amnesty from a Dutch fund but we have also raised money through National Sections and newspaper appeals. The situation is still urgently a cause for concern as we do not know from one month to the next how much we will be able to send to Greece. We feel that we are committed by our actions over the past three years to go on with this relief programme, especially now that the International Red Cross has been forced to close down its Athens office. Another point worth raising at this time is that 21 April is the fourth anniversary of the coup which led to the present regime. It is a good opportunity for renewing efforts on behalf of Greek prisoners of conscience and for appealing for an amnesty.

Rhodesia - Cold Comfort Farm: After arriving in England Mr. Guy Clutton-Brock of Cold Comfort Farm visited the Amnesty International Secretariat to talk to staff and volunteers about conditions in Rhodesia. Deprived of his Rhodesian citizenship, Mr. Clutton-Brock, the treasurer of the Farm and one of its founders, was deported on 6 February 1971. Cold Comfort Farm was established in 1965 as a multi-racial, agricultural co-operative. However, the area was declared white under the Land Apportionment Act and the community has now been declared an unlawful organisation by the Rhodesian Government. On 18 November 1970 security police raided the Farm. The Chairman, Mr. Didymus Mutasa, was served with a detention order and the members have been ordered to disband the association and leave the site. On 19 February another member of the Cold Comfort Farm Society, Mr. Arthur Chadzingwa, was fined £114 and given a one-year suspended sentence for being a member of the banned Zimbabwe African People's Union.

RECOMMENDED BOOKS: "IN QUEST OF JUSTICE: Protest and Dissent in the Soviet Union Today", by Abraham Brumberg. Pall Mall Press. 70s. "SOUTHERN AFRICAN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS", by Lord Caradon. Africa Bureau 3/6, available from their office at 2 Arundel St., WC2R 3DA.

POSTCARDS FOR PRISONERS CAMPAIGN

Some news of prisoners who have been on this campaign:

Ilias Illiou -- Greece (May 1967) -- a lawyer and leader of the Greek EDA parliamentary group, has been released.

Georgios Iordanidis -- Greece (December 1970). General Iordanidis has been moved to the prison hospital in Averoff prison in Athens. The Amnesty group which adopted him approached a well-known British military figure who pleaded with the Greek Prime Minister for more humane treatment for the General. He received a reply from the Greek Chief of Staff. However, when General Iordanidis suffered another heart attack and applied to go to a civilian hospital for treatment he was refused permission. This has now been taken up again with the authorities.

Father Joaquim Pinto de Andrade -- Portugal (September 1970). His trial started on the 11th February 1971, but the outcome is not yet known. A Spanish lawyer observed the trial on Amnesty's behalf.

Helen Joseph -- South Africa (November 1967). A plea for the lifting of the house arrest order on Mrs. Helen Joseph was made in the South African Parliament on 17 February by Mrs. Helen Suzman, the only Progressive Party MP. Mrs. Suzman was asking for the release of a number of South Africa's 800 political prisoners to mark the celebration of the tenth anniversary of the Republic on 31 May.

This month's prisoners:

Dr. John KAREFA SMART - SIERRA LEONE

After a disputed election in 1967 a military coup overthrew the post-independence civilian regime in Sierra Leone. Military rule lasted just over twelve months and ended when another coup resulted in the return to power of Mr. Siaka Stevens, whose All People's Congress (APC) had in fact won the 1967 election. In 1968 and 1969 tension grew between the APC and the opposition Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP) which had ruled the country from 1961 to 1967. During 1970 a number of APC members became dissatisfied with the government and a new party, the National Democratic Party (NDP) was formed, stirring up opposition to the PAC with news-sheets and meetings. A crisis came in September when two cabinet ministers resigned from the government. Another new party was formed, called the United Democratic Party (UDP), and including most former NDP members as well as the new dissidents within government ranks.

One of the leaders of the UDP was Dr. John Karefa Smart. A former cabinet minister in the pre-1967 SLPP regime, he was later Deputy Director of the World Health Organisation in Geneva. He is thought to have been long regarded, particularly by Mr. Stevens himself, as one of the Prime Minister's major rivals for political leadership. He returned to Sierra Leone during the summer of 1970, just as friction between the APC and its critics was reaching its height. By autumn there were violent clashes between APC and UDP supporters in various parts of the country. This crisis culminated in the banning of the UDP by the government, the declaration of a State of Emergency, and the arrest of most of the UDP leaders. Writs of habeas corpus were denied, and those detained were held without trial. Dr. Karefa Smart was one of them. The State of Emergency was ratified by the National Assembly in mid-October, and although rumours of the impending release of the UDP leaders have been current several times since then, only one of them has so far been set free.

Please send your cards to: The Hon. S.P. Stevens, Prime Minister and Minister of Defence and the Interior, Government of Sierra Leone, Freetown, Sierra Leone; or, the Hon. O.J. Shaw, Ag. Attorney General, Attorney General's Chambers, Freetown, Sierra Leone.

Jose Alves Tavares MAGRO - PORTUGAL

Jose Alves Tavares Magro is a former office worker - a clerk - and a leading member of the Portuguese Communist Party. As the Communist Party -- in common with all other parties except the ruling party, Accao Nacional Popular -- is banned in Portugal he has spent much of his life as a fugitive or in prison.

In March 1945 the PIDE (political police) raided his home, apparently with the intention of arresting him for activities against the Salazar government. But he had already gone into hiding. His wife joined him with their baby daughter and they remained at liberty until 1951 when he was arrested and sentenced to two and a half years' imprisonment plus Security Measures. Security Measures are a form of preventive detention which can be imposed for consecutive periods ranging from six months to three years, and Jose Magro served six years before being released in 1957. Soon after his release his wife Aida was arrested and they did not see each other for six years. At the beginning of this period he went into hiding again but was again caught and re-sentenced, in 1959. This time the sentence was 10 years plus Security Measures. He was sent to Caxias Prison where in 1961 he took part in an escape bid which led to his freedom for a while but in 1962 he was arrested once more and sentenced to a further 10 years, together with another period of Security Measures. In 1966 an extra sentence of five years was imposed.

This prisoner is obviously detained for no other reason than his work for the Communist Party. (It does not advocate violent policies). In December 1970, 5,000 people in Portugal signed a petition for his release. At the beginning of 1970 he went through the normal procedural hearing for conditional freedom, but he has not yet been informed whether this will be granted or not. Jose Magro has now spent 17 years in prison, with at least another nine to serve. Now aged about fifty, he will be nearly sixty by the end of his present sentence. He is known to be suffering from a duodenal ulcer and in view of his bad health and the excessively long period he has spent in prison, pleas should be made for his immediate release.

Send your cards to: Exmo. Sr. Dr. Marcelo Caetano, Presidente do Conselho, Lisbon, Portugal; or to the Portuguese Ambassador in your country.

Thomas GEBHARDT - EAST GERMANY (German Democratic Republic)

Thomas Gebhardt, a practising Christian, is a conscientious objector to military service. In November 1970 he was sentenced to nineteen months' imprisonment by a military court in Dresden for refusing to serve in the People's Army. He is now serving his sentence in Bautzen Prison.

Military service has been compulsory in the GDR since 1962. The right to conscientious objection is not recognised as such, but unlike the other countries of the Communist bloc the GDR has made some attempt to deal with the problem of people who refuse to carry weapons for reasons of conscience. In 1964 so-called "construction units" (Baueinheiten) were set up within the army to perform work on military installations. People recruited for these construction units are exempted from armed service but are required to wear uniform and are treated as military personnel. The law which established the construction units suggested that they provided a convenient form of service for those who objected to armed service on grounds of conscience. It is not known what percentage of those engaged in construction work are conscientious objectors to military service. It is clear, however, that the construction units do not constitute alternative civilian service in any sense, as they directly promote the aims and work of the army. As such, service in the construction units would be unacceptable to most pacifists and it is known that many young Lutherans have chosen to go to prison rather than to the construction units.

Thomas Gebhardt seems to be a typical case. Before his arrest, he worked as a warden in a children's home in Gloschütte, Saxony, run by the Innere Mission, a Protestant organisation. (Although the churches in the GDR are subject to State control over their affairs, they enjoy some freedom. They have been able to continue with some charitable work, and can prepare children for confirmation). His wife also worked there. In countries where the right to conscientious objection is recognised, work of this type is sometimes accepted by the State as an alternative civilian service.

Please send your cards to:

EITHER

Der Vorsitzende des Staatsrates der DDR,
Walter Ulbricht,
DDR Berlin-Niederschönhausen,
Carl-von-Ossietzy-Strasse,
German Democratic Republic.
(Chairman of the State Council of the GDR)

OR

Justizminister der DDR,
Kurt Wünsche,
DDR 108 Berlin W.8,
Clara-Zetkin-Str.93,
German Democratic Republic.
(Minister of Justice)