

# Trade unionists in prison

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1977  
Prisoners of  
Conscience Year

amnesty  
international



The trade union movement today serves as a forum for frank, free discussion of human rights - not merely of economic rights, but also the basic rights of free association, without which trade unions could not survive. As a result, it has been attacked by some governments, who see organized labor's defence of these freedoms as a threat to the *status quo*. This has led to repression of trade unions, the extent of which was indicated by Amnesty International's first list of imprisoned trade unionists, published in December 1974 - 229 people jailed in 17 countries for trade union activities. Lists compiled by Amnesty International in 1976 and 1977 show that the situation has not improved.

Trade unions are banned outright in some countries; in others, they are forbidden to make their own policies and are part of the state apparatus. In other countries, although not banned, their members are severely harassed. Hundreds of people all over the

world are in prison merely because they have asserted their rights to trade union activity.

Other trade unionists have been detained because of their political beliefs and associations rather than their trade union activity.

Amnesty International has taken action on behalf of black South Africans who have been arrested or "banned" because of their work for a black trade union movement. In Rhodesia too, leaders of black trade unions have been among the hundreds detained by the Smith regime for nationalist activities. In independent Africa, Amnesty International has adopted imprisoned trade union leaders in Mali, Tunisia, Morocco and the Central African Empire.

Latin American trade unionists have been among the most persecuted. Those sentenced to death or life imprisonment after



**Sipho Kubheka, South Africa**  
Sipho Kubheka, aged 23, organizing secretary of the Johannesburg Metal and Allied Workers' Union (MAWU), was "banned" for five years under the November 1976 Internal Security Act. The "banning" order places him under partial house arrest and limits his freedom of expression and association. The Minister of Justice gave no reasons for the "banning", but, clearly, it is aimed at

preventing him from participating in black trade union activities. More than 15 other black trade union activists were also "banned" in November 1976, a vivid illustration of the difficulty African trade unionists face operating in apartheid South Africa.

Before his "banning order", Sipho Kubheka was arrested in March 1976 with four other trade unionists, when police dispersed a demonstration by 500 African workers involved in a dispute with an electronics factory. The employers had sacked the Africans for organizing the MAWU trade union.

In August 1976, Kubheka and another MAWU organizer, Gavin Andersson, were convicted under South Africa's Bantu Labour Relations and Industrial Conciliation Acts. Kubheka's sentence was a fine or 45 days' imprisonment. Amnesty International has adopted him as a

prisoner of conscience.

**Ms. Sri Ambar Rukmiati, Indonesia**

When the 1965 coup attempt occurred, Sri Ambar was head of the women's section of the left-wing Indonesian trade union federation, SOBSI. It had been banned after the coup for alleged communist tendencies. Her SOBSI activities began in the early 1950's, and in 1964, she was elected to the National Council.

After the abortive coup, she managed to evade arrest, but was finally caught in late 1966. Though she denied having helped produce and distribute an underground workers' paper, she was badly tortured. Her two teenage daughters were arrested. One was tortured in her presence. Her trade unionist husband was also arrested and is still in prison.

In early 1975, Sri Ambar was tried by the Jakarta State Court



"Human Rights, Article 23(4)"  
cartoon by A. Houtsch

along with three other women. They were charged with, among other things, having helped publish and distribute an illegal paper.

She was found guilty of subversion and of attempting to revive banned organizations, and was sentenced to 15 years' imprisonment.

Until the trial, she was held in Jakarta's Bukit prison. It is not known if she has since been transferred. She was adopted by Amnesty International in July 1972.



**Humberto Fuentes Rodriguez, Chile**

Humberto Fuentes, aged 59, married and with six children, belonged to the builders' section of the Chilean Central Workers' Union (CUT). He was a councillor for Renca twice, and, was active as such at the time of the 1973 coup. He was arrested on 22 December 1973 and released, uncharged, 48 hours later.

On 4 October 1975, he was again

arrested by DINA (National Directorate of Intelligence).

According to his wife, the authorities refuse to say where he is or even to admit that he was arrested - despite statements by many witnesses that they observed his arrest or had seen him in secret detention centers. The legal case has now been filed away, pending further evidence.

Humberto Fuentes is just one of 1,500 people who have disappeared after arrest since the coup. He has been adopted by Amnesty International as a prisoner of conscience, and is featured in a recent AI publication, *Disappeared Prisoners in Chile*.

the 1973 military coup in Chile included many trade unionists. In March 1977, Amnesty International publicized the fate of 1,500 Chilean prisoners who had "disappeared". Many were trade unionists. In Argentina, Guatemala, Brazil, Nicaragua and Uruguay trade union members have also disappeared after being kidnapped by parapolice "death squads".

Indonesia is probably the Asian country with most imprisoned trade unionists. The majority have been held without trial since 1965 in deplorable prison conditions. Since the emergency regulations were introduced in India in June 1975, tens of thousands of Indira Gandhi's political opponents, including trade unionists, have been imprisoned without trial. Trade union activists have also been jailed in Pakistan, Singapore and the Philippines.

Trade unionists in Europe and the Middle East too have been imprisoned and ill-

treated. They range from the leaders of the illegal Construction Workers Union in Bahrain, detained for years without charge or trial, to the 12 members of the Spanish unofficial union, Confederacion Nacional de Trabajo, arrested in Barcelona in January 1977 and brutally treated. In Eastern Europe, where the trade unions are an integral part of the governmental system, people are rarely imprisoned for trade union activity. Recently, however, Amnesty International has acted on behalf of workers arrested and allegedly beaten after the strikes and unrest in Poland in June 1976.

Like the trade union movement, Amnesty International believes in collective responsibility for defending other people's rights. And so, during Prisoners of Conscience Year 1977, Amnesty International calls on trade unionists all over the world to join in the campaign for the liberation of their imprisoned colleagues and all other prisoners of conscience.



**Anis Balafrej, Morocco**  
Anis Balafrej, 26-year-old son of a former close adviser of King Hassan II, was a teacher at Casablanca Ecole Nationale des Travaux Publics when he was arrested in June 1972. He was also a leader of the Moroccan National Students Union, banned in 1973 because most of its members were Marxists.

During 1972 many young intellectuals were arrested because of

their left-wing political affiliations. Anis Balafrej was one of their leaders. Eighty-one were tried in Casablanca during August 1973, charged with plotting to overthrow the state. As Marxist-Leninists, they had been persistently harassed by the government.

A minority advocated violence, but an Amnesty International observer at the trial stressed that the main reason for their detention was their opposition to the government.

In November 1975, the prisoners of Kenitra prison were severely punished after guards had been caught smuggling newspapers and radios to them. When some prisoners were removed for punishment, others went on hunger-strike in solidarity. Anis Balafrej had to be rushed to hospital because of a deteriorating stomach ulcer developed in detention.

As a punishment, and due to his illness, he has been kept in solitary confinement since. He is held *Incomunicado* apart from family visits. He was adopted by Amnesty International in February 1973.

*These cases have been chosen by Amnesty International to illustrate the plight of trade unionists in prison. As of 15 March 1977 these are all active cases. Should they be released during POC Year 1977 the facts of their detention and imprisonment nonetheless remain relevant.*

#### What you or your party can do to support Prisoner of Conscience Year

- 1 Become an active member of Amnesty International and encourage your work-mates to do the same.
- 2 Use your journals to publicize Amnesty International actions for imprisoned trade unionists.
- 3 Encourage your union to lend their public support to POC Year, and to circulate the petition for the release of all political prisoners (See over).

4 Sign and circulate the petition on the back of this coupon. Amnesty International is presenting it to the United Nations and Governments of the World on Dec 10th 1977.

5 Join the Amnesty International Urgent Action network and send telegrams in cases of extreme urgency to prevent someone being tortured, to appeal for clemency, to avoid the execution of death sentences.

6 Organize fundraising for POC Year amongst your colleagues and affiliated trade unions.

- I/We want to join Amnesty International and enclose £ membership fee

- Send the following number of copies of the Petition
- 100    500    1000

- Send copies of this brochure for distribution by/in my organisation
- 100    500    1000

- I/We enclose £ as a donation. Funds are urgently needed.

- Put me/us on the mailing list for Amnesty International's Newsletter during Prisoner of Conscience Year £6

Name, address and organization (if any)

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# Petition

## for the release of Prisoners of Conscience

During 1977 Prisoners of Conscience Year, Amnesty International supporters will be circulating the petition below. We welcome your help in obtaining signatures from colleagues and friends.

"We, the undersigned,

*OUTRAGED* that in many parts of the world, men and women who have neither used nor advocated violence suffer imprisonment solely because of their political or religious beliefs, their race colour, or language;

this, despite the many humane and noble declarations of the assembled nations of the world, beginning with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights three decades ago,

Please complete in **BLOCK CAPITALS**, with your signature, and return with coupon on back to: your national section. If you do not belong to a

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*URGE the General Assembly of the United Nations*

to take swift and concrete steps to ensure strict observance in all countries of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights

*and urge each and every government in the world*

to act for the immediate release of all prisoners of conscience."

national section please return to: Amnesty International, International Secretariat, 10 Southampton Street, London WC2E 7HF, England.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

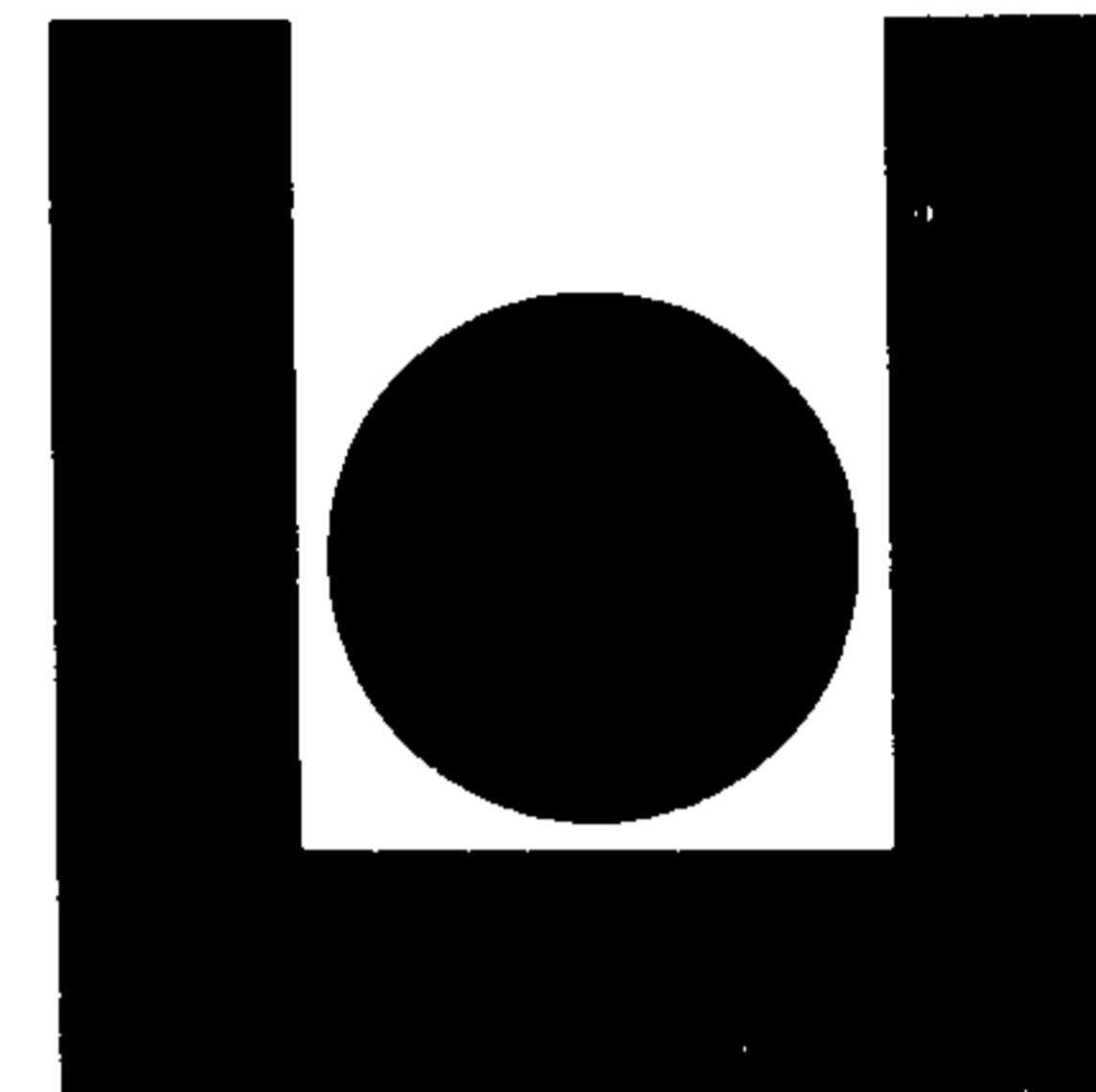
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The Year 1977 has been declared Prisoners of Conscience Year. In a coordinated campaign, the groups and members of Amnesty International will seek to intensify public awareness and concern about violations of human rights wherever they occur and to bring greater support to prisoners of conscience throughout the world. Special contributions are being made by outstanding figures in the world of art, film, music, literature and design. Signatures will be collected in all countries for a petition urging: 1) the General Assembly of the United Nations "to take swift and concrete steps to ensure strict observance of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights," and 2) urging all governments "to act for the immediate

release of all prisoners of conscience."

Funds raised during this special year will be administered under the authority of the International Executive Committee of Amnesty International and will be devoted to the strengthening of the national programs and structures of the Amnesty International movement and for capital expenditure within the International Secretariat.

During Prisoner of Conscience Year Amnesty International will be producing lists of prisoners who are adoption or investigation cases in the following categories. These lists do not include all prisoners of conscience in the relevant category.

- Trade Unionists
- Journalists
- Parliamentarians
- Medical Personnel

And brochures on the following topics:

- Journalists/Writers
- Parliamentarians
- Medical Profession
- Lawyers
- Trade Unionists
- Women
- Teachers and Schools

# amnesty international

... is a worldwide human rights movement which is independent of any government, political faction, ideology or religious creed. It works for the release of men and women imprisoned anywhere for their beliefs, colour, ethnic origin or religion, provided they have neither used nor advocated violence. These are termed "prisoners of conscience".

... opposes torture and capital punishment in all cases and without reservation. It advocates fair and speedy trials for all political prisoners.

... seeks observance throughout the world of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights and of the UN Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners.

... has consultative status with the United Nations (ECOSOC), UNESCO and the Council of Europe, has cooperative relations with the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights of the Organization of American States and has observer status with the Organization of African Unity (Bureau for the Placement and Education of African Refugees).

... is financed by its members throughout the world, by individual subscription and by donations.