During the last few months, the Amnesty groups abroad have increased in number. In addition to those already working in Australia, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland and the United States, new groups have started work in Finland and Israel and the numbers of groups in Denmark has risen to 9, in Germany to 14 and in both Canada and Switzerland to 2.

All sorts of problems have arisen from their experiences, quite apart from the well-known ones of contacts, lack of replies etc. For instance, the question arose whether a group should write in its own language and risk misunderstandings or always in English or French. One of the letters quoted below illustrates this problem. What does a group do for a prisoner in a country which has no diplomatic representative in the group's country? In some countries, groups find that there is very little information normally circulated about the countries in which these groups have prisoners. Again, in some countries the traditional political attitude makes it difficult for supporters of Amnesty to undertake work for prisoners in particular countries, but Amnesty feels that its tripartite concern for prisoners of differing political opinions as a guarantee of its impartiality must be upheld. We are always grateful to groups if they let us know their opinions on such problems.

It is perhaps difficult for groups abroad without direct contact with head office fully to appreciate the obstacles in the way of obtaining accurate information about prisoners. An interesting example was provided only recently by a case on which the Victoria Group in Australia has been working for about two years. An East German, Günther Kemnitz, was arrested in 1952 and disappeared without trace. This was all we knew definitely from a reliable source. A fortnight ago, the group received information -- ultimately through the Soviet Red Cross -- that Kemnitz was executed in December 1952. All enquiries from East German and Russian authorities had proved useless. The former never replied, the latter had no information. Sad confirmation was thus provided of Amnesty's original decision in putting the prisoner on its list, and the misgivings of one group abroad which had assumed that because there was no information, Günther Kemnitz had never been arrested at all proved to be unfounded. The Victoria Group had appealed to all groups with prisoners in East Germany to help them with this enquiry and report now that in this way they received a lot of valuable information and ideas from other groups.

We are very grateful to groups who send us details of cases which they hear of. We have thus received information from Denmark and Germany about prisoners of whom we so far knew nothing.

The Danish Section has published its first comprehensive newsletter, mostly about its own activities.

Finally, here are some letters or excerpts from letters which may be of interest to all groups. A letter from West Berlin, written in English by the sister of a student imprisoned in Brandenburg Zuchthaus, East Germany, to the "adopting" group in Ireland contains the following passage:

"As things are it seems difficult for you to give direct help to my brother. However, I feel it's very important to write to the ministers there over and over again as you have done. The fact that there is interest in other countries outside Germany in the political sentences passed by courts in the Soviet Zone impresses them and makes them less sure of themselves. And even if it would make them more reticent in future trials, your letters would serve a good purpose. What about writing to the head of the Brandenburg jail, Major Ackermann?"
It should be mentioned here that this student is one of a group of students and other young men who were sentenced in 1958 to various terms of penal servitude. Most of them by now are free again and Friedhelm Fröhlich, who had a sentence of 8 years and who had been adopted by an Irish group, has been released recently, 3 years before finishing his sentence.

One of the Danish groups received a letter in reply to a Christmas card sent to a prisoner in Czechoslovakia - the adopting group is one of the Australian groups in New South Wales - who, we had learnt meanwhile, had been released some time ago but who nevertheless had the card sent to his home from the prison:

"Esteemed and dear lady,
Your kind good wishes reached me when I had already returned to my family. We were all very pleased that we have friends in the wide world who have taken part in the struggle for my freedom. To my regret I do not yet master Esperanto and therefore reply to you in the German Language.
Once more many thanks and best wishes for the coming Christmas. With good wishes for a happy and successful new year and kind regards,
Yours sincerely,
Josef Büchner."

The problem of language mentioned above became clear from the following episode - the English wife of an Iraqi prisoner wrote to the secretary of the Italian Section:

"One day the prison officer came to X and said "Do you know English well?" X, of course, replied "Yes". So the officer asked him to come along to the office and translate "some few words". When my husband saw the letter he realized it was an appeal from you on his behalf and written in Italian. This he explained to the officer, but the officer refused to believe him, and insisted that it was a complaint from Italy that he (my husband) had assaulted a girl in Italy and was to be taken there under arrest! However, X eventually managed to convince the officer of the truth, and that the letter was, in fact, addressed to the Governor. Anyway, it was a good joke and made my husband laugh! From your point of view it is proof that your letters are at least arriving in Iraq safely. My husband has not received any of my letters, although I have written regularly. I do not know if they are held up with the censors, or at the prison itself."

The prisoner in question has now been released and is waiting to be granted an exit visa.

RELEASES

SISTER MARIA RUJA, RUMANIA, born about 1925; catholic nun at St. Mary's Convent in Bucharest; arrested in 1950 and sentenced to 20 years for information allegedly passed through children. In 1962 she was reported to be suffering from T.B. Last year in July a group in Chester began working for her release. With the help of a catholic nun in Cambridge, who had herself spent many years in Rumania and knew Sister Ruja well, she was released in December 1963. Although in very precarious health, the report read that she arrived more dead than alive - she is happy to be once again amongst the sisters of her own Order.

JOSE ANTONIO ALBISU, SPAIN, a medical student from San Sebastian on charges of belonging to the Basque Nat.Movet; arrested in winter 1962 and tried on a charge of 'illegal activities'. Whilst the public prosecutor asked for six years, A.Albisu was in fact sentenced to 3 years imprisonment on 2nd March 1963. The group - Chester once again, conducted a tireless correspondence
with the Spanish Ambassador and the Minister of Justice. In October of the same year, Mr. Medariaga - their 'contact' - informed the Group that Antonio Albisu was to be released in November. Coincidence? We don’t know, but it was encouraging news in any event.

OTHER RELEASES - Abdallah Layachi, Morocco - Glasgow Group
S. Mbele, Sth. Africa - St. Angela’s Convent, London
K. Gazes, Greece - Reading University
Christos Dimitras, Greece - Letchworth
Dr. W. Salman Hassan, Iraq - Liverpool


GROUP ACTIVITIES - Edinburgh - A great deal of press publicity was given to case of Bishop Basil Hopko, Auxiliary Bishop of the Byzantine-Slavonic Rite Catholic See of Pryashiv for the Ukraine. He had been arrested in March 1950, together with Bishop Paul Goydych of Pryashiv. During a "People’s Trial" in January 1951 Goydych was condemned to life imprisonment; Mgr. Hopko’s fate remained obscure until last year. A great deal of information became known to the Group and the widest possible appeal for Bishop Hopko’s release was launched all through Scotland, with the support of the Rev. Bruce Findlow of St. Mark’s Unitarian Church and chairman of the Scottish Committee of A.I.

Whilst the Scottish Section complained to the B.B.C. Home Service and T.V. that publicity given to A.I. in England was not being transmitted to the Scottish Regions, Rev. B. Findlow made a brief appearance on “Church News and Views” transmitted on Sunday, 12th January on the Scottish Home Service, which was repeated on 22nd January in "Christian Outlook".

Sevenoaks - On 28th February the Sevenoaks Telegraph gave front-page publicity to the activities of a four-member Group, working for the release of the 60-year old Prince Baranyanka - father of two sons executed last year following the assassination of the Prime Minister of Burundi. Mr. Cooper, Group Secretary, has been in touch with the Belgian chaplain of Mr. Baranyanka, consulted the British barrister who attended the trial for Amnesty International, and has now written to the King of Burundi.

As a result of press publicity the Sevenoaks Branch of the World Council of Churches has requested a talk on our work; Mr. Cooper has kindly undertaken to address the meeting.

Woking Friends - Mr. K. Cottman, chairman of the Guildford THREE, addressed a meeting attended by Muslims, Catholics and Friends, resulting in the immediate formation of a new group. Mr. Cottman has addressed several meetings in the past, just as many other experienced Group members have done all over the provinces.

RUMANIAN SILENCE - Not on a single occasion amongst the 106 prisoners adopted has it been known that any reply was received from a single source, except once when the Ambassador briefly acknowledged a letter. It is therefore a thankless task in the extreme. All the same, the policy of patient and repeated pleading is the only one which in the end will succeed. An example of such persistance was shown to us in the report of the Marylebone Group, who have continued and are continuing to write to all the addresses suggested by Mr. Vorvoreanu at monthly intervals. If every single Group follows this suggestion, we have no doubt that it will be effective. The Marylebone Group have also written to the 'International Trade Union', so far without any result. It would be well advised to approach Directors of Travel Agencies too. They are anxious that you should visit Rumania, but will get worried if you request that, before you are able to enjoy the pleasures of a holiday, you need to know restrictions imposed on their citizens will not also be imposed on the tourist!
UNIVERSITY COLLEGE LONDON - A meeting is being held on March 12th by the UCL Groups. Speakers from Turkey, Angola and Ceylon will give talks about prison conditions in their countries. Another London Group has asked for several speakers, preferably ex-prisoners.

£1 SUBSCRIPTION FOR GROUP MEMBERS - It has been put forward that members of THREES Groups should be entitled to all Amnesty literature for £1 instead of the usual £2. This will be put to the vote at the A.G.M. in June, and since we have reached the subject of the Annual General Meeting, could I please ask Group leaders to submit their own annual report to us for use in the Annual Report.

PUBLICITY - The television programme featuring the Eltham Group has now been shown in Victoria, Australia.

A LETTER FROM A MOROCCAN imprisoned in Rabat sent to the BRISTOL THREES.


A Monsieur Georges Emerrel, Sales Representative, Bristol, Eng.

Cher Monsieur,

J'ai été profondément touché par la reconfortant carte de vœux que vous m'avez adressée. Soyez en remerci au nom de tous mes amis et co-détenus, qui vous envoient, leur tour, leurs vœux chaleureux pour une bonne et heureux année.

Mes amis et moi-même, vous serions obligés si vous vouliez bien transmettre notre salut et nos encouragements à Amnesty International pour l'action exaltante qu'elle mène à travers le monde pour le triomphe de droits de l'homme les plus sacrés.

Soyez persuadez que/même combat est mené aussi au Maroc que ce soit à l'intérieur ou à l'extérieur des prisons.

Je me permets de vous transmettre mon adresse familliaale pour pouvoir rester en contact à l'avenir.

(6 bis rue du Pont du Jour, CASABLANCA)

Yours sincerely,

A. Yousefi,"

HOLIDAYS - IF ANY MEMBER OF A GROUP IS HOLIDAYING ABROAD, COULD THEY MANAGE TO VISIT SOME OF THE GROUPS IN THE SCANDINAVIAN COUNTRIES AND GERMANY AND DISCUSS WITH THEM THEIR COMMON PROBLEMS?

March 1964