May 1980

TRADE UNION INFORMATION SHEET NO. 8:
FOCUS ON WORKERS AND TRADE UNIONISTS IN PRISON

BRAZIL

Readers who have followed developments during the six-week long strike of Brazilian metal workers in the industrial suburbs of São Paulo will be glad to learn that all the trade unionists detained for their involvement were released on 21 May. The charges against them have not, however, been dropped and it is expected that they will be put on trial accused of "inciting a strike", for which the penalty under the Law of National Security is from two to 12 years' imprisonment.

The arrests began as soon as an industrial court reversed its earlier decision and, under pressure from the government, declared the strike illegal, on 18 April. That same day, the President of the São Bernardo and Diadema branch of the metal workers' union, Luis Inacio da Silva, popularly known as "Lula", was taken to the Departamento de Ordem Política e Social (DOPS), formerly a notorious torture centre, where he was held incommunicado for eight days.

In the weeks that followed, many more trade unionists were arrested and detained in DOPS while others were released. Because of the constant fluctuation in the number of those in custody, Amnesty International sent out numerous Urgent Action appeals to keep members up-to-date on the situation and to urge them to appeal to the Brazilian authorities to grant those in detention the normal legal guarantees. The strike, in support of a demand for a 15 per cent pay increase, ended on 11 May after the union voted to accept a 7 per cent rise. Their other demand, for an assurance that their jobs would be guaranteed one year, was not met. In fact, more than 1,000 metal workers are reported to have been dismissed within days of settlement.

One of the Urgent Action appeals was on behalf of a French citizen, Jean Vincent EGLIN, who was believed to have had contacts with trade unionists. He was detained on 24 April and moved to a military hospital the next day with fractures to his skull, collar bone and pelvis. The police said he had been hit by an army truck. Later that day, he was removed from the hospital and finally expelled from the country a few days later.

A separate strike for higher pay by teachers in the Brazilian state of Minas Gerais led to the temporary arrest of five members of their union on 20 April. While in detention in the local DOPS, the five went on hunger strike and Amnesty International immediately issued an Urgent Action appeal on their behalf. Three weeks after, Amnesty International heard that the strike was over and that the five trade unionists had been released.