

monthly newsletter from amnesty international

postcards for prisoners campaign

April, 1968.

Here is some news about previous prisoners:

Jan Benes, Czechoslovakia (July 1967 Newsletter). Members will be delighted to hear that Jan Benes, the Czech writer, was released as a result of recent political events in Czechoslovakia. It is believed that almost all the political and religious prisoners in Czechoslovakia have been released, but we have not yet been able to confirm whether this is so. (See also STOP PRESS on page 4.)

Sheikh Majibur Rahman, Pakistan (January 1968 Newsletter). Although he has been in prison for the past eighteen months, Majibur Rahman has now been accused of taking part in a recent plot to bring about the secession of East Pakistan by force. The arrest of other alleged plotters was announced at the beginning of January, 1968. The government has stated that those accused of taking part in the plot will be brought to trial, but there is no indication of when this will be.

Howard Levy, U.S.A. (July 1967 Newsletter). Howard Levy has now been placed in solitary confinement for some infraction of prison rules arising out of remarks found by army censors in letters to his Counsel, Mr Charles Morgan. Mr Morgan states that the rules of disciplinary barracks provide that a prisoner is entitled to communicate confidentially with his attorney. In other words Dr Levy is being punished for remarks made in what should have been confidential letters. Mr Morgan reports that Dr Levy is confined in a cell five-by-ten-foot, with a single electric light bulb and a hole in the floor (which the guard can flush) for sanitation. A Fort Leavenworth official said that Dr Levy's release from solitary confinement was dependent on his "re-adjustment". You are asked to protest to:

Colonel G. Ackroyd, J.A.G.C.,
Chief Judicial Officer,
Department of the Army,
U.S. Army Judiciary,
Washington D.C. 20315.

Here are this month's prisoners:

Gregorio Bezerra, Brazil.

Gregorio Bezerra was born in 1901. He was a leader of the abortive communist rising in 1935 and served 9 years for his part in it. On his

release in 1945 he was elected Federal Deputy for the Communist Party in Recife. During the three years that he served in the Congress before communist members were deprived of their seats, he campaigned for the economic development of the backward North-East region of Brazil. He then moved to the countryside and organised peasant leagues. There he remained until 1957 when he returned to politics to campaign for the radical Governor of Pernambuco, Miguel Arraes, who was deposed at the time of the military coup d'etat and forced to live in exile. Within hours of the 1964 coup Gregorio Bezerra was arrested. He was dragged with a rope around his neck through the streets of Recife and publicly beaten by the soldiers who were escorting him. He was taken to prison where he was also tortured and where he remained for two years. The Supreme Court refused to issue a writ of habeas corpus on his behalf. He was tried before a Military Tribunal in February, 1967 for subversive activities - against a government that had only existed for a few hours at the time of his arrest - and his lawyer protested that they were prevented from exercising their rights in his defence. Finally he was sentenced to 19 years imprisonment - a monstrous sentence for a man of nearly seventy years.

In a letter to the Amnesty group which has adopted him, Bezerra wrote in June 1967: "I am not worried by my sentence. The only thing I want is the freedom of my people, freedom from hunger, want and underdevelopment, who are denied the right to a life of dignity, peace and prosperity".

Postcards should be sent appealing to the conscience of the Brazilian Government for the release of Gregorio Bezerra on grounds of his age and the extreme severity of his sentence.

Please send your cards to:

EITHER

The Minister of Justice,
Sr. Luis Viana Filho,
B-10, 4th Floor,
Brazilia.

OR

President Costa e Silva,
Placio do Planalto Plaza,
Praça Tres Troderes,
Brazilia.

Adem Demaci, Yugoslavia.

Demaci is a 34-year-old writer, serving a twelve-year sentence for "nationalist agitation". He is an Albanian and comes from the Kosmet, an area in the south-west of Yugoslavia inhabited by over a million Albanians whose Yugoslav nationality is the result of geographical accident rather than any common heritage with the rest of the population. The Kosmet is a remote and backward region, and since the war traditional Serbian-Albanian friction has delayed the development of its economic resources and of

the very limited cultural facilities open to the Albanian minority.

Demaci was arrested in 1964 at a time when any activity which could be interpreted as a manifestation of Albanian nationalism was severely repressed. He had written articles (published in the Albanian-language journal 'Jere e re'), short stories and translations from Russian into Albanian and Serbian. In these he stressed the sufferings of the Albanian people. His trial took place in Pristina and judgement was given on 8th June, 1964. He is now in POZAREVAC Prison. He has a wife and two small children.

Since 1966 the position of the Kosmet Albanians has greatly improved. Many of their demands for educational and employment opportunities have been met. If Demaci's writings were to appear now, it is unlikely that he would be given such a severe penalty. Cards should mention the date and place of the trial and the name of the prison.

Please send your cards to:

EITHER

Your local Yugoslav Ambassador

OR

The Federal Minister of Justice,
Drzavni Sekretarijat,
Pravde Savezne Republika Yugoslavia,
Beograd, Yugoslavia.

Essone Ndong, Gabon.

Essone Ndong was General Secretary of the Gabonese Trade Union Federation (C.N.T.G.) and Substitute Executive Board Member of the International Congress of Free Trade Unions.

Mr Ndong was arrested, together with several other Gabonese Trade Union leaders, in December 1967. Up to the end of February 1968 no charges had been preferred against any of these prisoners. They are still in detention and it is believed that they have not yet been brought to trial.

In January 1968 President Albert Bongo, who succeeded to the Presidency on the death of Leon Mba, announced an amnesty for all political prisoners either in prison or under house arrest as a result of the attempted coup in 1964. In addition Gabonese who had not been imprisoned but placed on "the national shame list" had their full rights of citizenship restored to them. The amnesty covered all those arrested or restricted up to 1966, thereby deliberately excluding more recent arrests.

Most trade union organisations are tending to find themselves in conflict with the government in newly independent one-party states which attempt to control trade union action and make the trade unions subordinate to party politics. Strikes are illegal in several countries. We understand that the conflict between the Gabonese government and the Trade

Union movement was brought into the open by a strike organised towards the end of 1967.

The International Congress of Free Trade Unions has appealed to the President of Gabon for Mr Ndong's release and has asked us to intervene on his behalf.

Please send your card to:

EITHER

Son Excellence,

M. Albert Bongo,

President de la Republique du Gabon,

Palais de President,

Libreville,

Gabon.

OR

Son Excellence,

M. Georges Rawiri,

Ambassadeur Extraordinaire et Pleni-

potentiaire,

Ambassade du Gabon,

rue Greuze 6,

Paris 16e.

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STOP PRESS

We have just received a letter from Jan Benes in Czechoslovakia, which we quote below in full.

"Dear frends,

very, very thank you. I am sorry, but very little I speak English.

Your truly

Jan Benes."

LATE STOP PRESS

L. T. ESSONE-N'DONG.(Please note correction.)

In a letter from the I.F.C.T.U. received as we were going to press, further information is given about trade union leaders arrested in Cabon. L.T. Essone-N'dong was arrested on 20th December, 1967. A week before his arrest his younger brother, a member of a Gabonese youth organisation, put out a statement critical of the Gabonese government's undemocratic handling of the country's affairs. This was widely distributed. The government, judging that Essone-N'dong's brother was not capable of writing such polished French, assumed that it must have been written by Essone-N'dong, using his brother as a cover. Accordingly both men were arrested. The brother is reported to have stated clearly during interrogation that he was the person responsible for the statement, but the government decided to keep them both in custody.