

AMNESTY NEWS

1 Mitre Court Buildings,
London, E.C.4. CEN 7867

June 1962

THE STORY OF ANTONIO AND ISARA COELHU

On May 23rd, the Daily Mirror printed the story of Isara and Antonio Coelhu - two Portuguese lovers who met in 1953 at a party, married in prison and, until Thursday, May 24th, had seen each other only twice a month and never alone. On May 24th Antonio was freed. Amnesty's part was to find the facts and risk giving these publicity. Whatever the cause and effect, the coincidence was startling.

The facts - apart from the happy ending - are among the saddest in Amnesty's files. Six months after the couple met Isara was arrested for helping to organise a nurse's union, and was sentenced to four years in jail. Antonio visited when he could, until a year before her release he himself was arrested with over 100 others, tried on charges of communist activities, and jailed for a year. The couple were forbidden even to write. When Isara was freed in 1957 she, in her turn, visited Antonio in prison 50 miles away. They planned to marry in 1959, but his sentence was extended for another three years under Portugal's security laws. Isara, however, managed to persuade the authorities to let them marry in prison. After the ceremony they were allowed to sit together for a little while, but not even to hold hands.

Then followed another three years of visits twice a month. Now at last, after nine years, they are together.

AMNESTY CONFERENCE

Tickets are still available for the conference on 'Personal Freedom in the Marxist Countries' and for 'Threes' conference on June 16th. For details see page 3.

MAY REPORT

On May 31st, Lionel Elvin, Chairman of Amnesty's Policy Committee, led a deputation to the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, Mr. Peter Thomas, urging that Britain should ratify the Articles of the European Convention of Human Rights allowing individuals to appeal to the Commission of Europe where they felt that human rights had been violated and to accept the jurisprudence of the International Court on Human Rights. At the present time all nations belonging to the Council of Europe have ratified these Articles except France, Turkey, Greece and Great Britain.

Colonel Draper, speaking for Amnesty, urged that if Britain could not adopt the Articles on behalf of herself and 42 dependencies all at once, she should consider doing this by stages. The Minister promised that the views expressed would be carefully considered!

Peter Benenson was the narrator in a Broadcast in the Home Service on May 27th - Amnesty's anniversary - on 'Political Prisoners'. A small party was also given in London on May 29th and a presentation made to Peter Benenson to mark the movement's first year's work.

Confirmation that Amnesty's work is penetrating behind the Iron Curtain came in the shape of a letter from Archbishop Nikodim, Chairman of the Moscow Council for External Church Relations, in reply to an appeal to all churches to support our work. He says in conclusion 'The Russian Orthodox Church has from time immemorial always offered up prayers for the sick, the suffering and the enslaved among all Christians. We wish the international movement "Amnesty" success in its efforts to bring about justice among the peoples and peace on earth'.

During May individual supporters of Amnesty have been able to collect useful information about conditions of prisoners and families in Greece, Spain and Portugal. It is hoped to send an official investigator to Rumania sometime in July.

PERSONAL FREEDOM IN THE MARXIST COUNTRIES

Saturday, June 16th, 1962, 2 - 6 p.m.

at

The Royal Hotel, Woburn Place, W.C.1.

This is Amnesty's second conference in the series 'Personal Freedom in Contemporary Society'. The conference will deal with two aspects of personal freedom 'Freedom of Expression' and 'Freedom of the Accused'.

Chairman: F. Elwyn-Jones, Q.C., M.P.

Speakers: Lionel Elvin, Dr. J. Keep
and Leonard Schapiro.

Tickets 5/- each.

Please apply for tickets as soon as possible. A paper, compiled by Dr. Keep, on conditions in the Marxist countries will be sent with each ticket.

THREES CONFERENCE

This is a conference being held specially at the request of 'Three' groups so that they can exchange experiences and consider future activities. It is open - free of charge - to all members of Threes or those interested in forming a Threes group. Amnesty investigators will be present to answer questions on Ghana, Czechoslovakia, East Germany and Portugal.

11 a.m. - 1 p.m., Saturday, June 16th,
The Royal Hotel, Woburn Place, London, W.C.1.

Please write for tickets to 1, Mitre Court Buildings.

MEMBERSHIP: Amnesty has attracted nearly 100 new members during the last few weeks, but to be an effective organisation membership must grow. We appeal to our existing members to help.

RELEASES AND IMPRISONMENTS

President Novotny of Czechoslovakia has pardoned people accused of committing certain anti-state offences, such as 'maligning the Republic and its representatives' and 'quitting the Republic'. Details about those freed, however, are hard to get. The Portuguese Government has ordered the release of Indian subjects interned in Portuguese possessions after the fall of Goa and four Indian airmen, who were kept prisoner by the Nagas after their aircraft was shot down during a supply dropping mission to an Indian Army outpost in August 1960, have also been released.

Three Greek women, mothers of families, are now out of prison. These are Avgi Georgiou, Maria Gerogiou, and Dora Georgiadou - the latter a very sick woman. It is believed that a number of others have also been released, but at least 20 are still in gaol.

In one of the most sweeping orders under the group areas legislation, the South African Government has declared most of Johannesburg 'a white area'. Many thousands of coloured and Indian people living and trading there are allowed only one year's grace to move. Yet no provision exists for adequate rehousing of displaced communities.

Three people - Ben Turok, a former member of the Cape Provincial Council, Water Sisulu of the African National Congress and A.M. Kathrada, an Indian political leader - all prominent in the long treason trial, have been detained again under the Suppression of Communism Act.

THREES

New Groups have been formed in Baron's Court (London), Sheffield and Sevenoaks. Supporters in Croydon and Basingstoke would like to hear of others interested in forming a group.

Would anyone interested in joining an existing group or forming a new one please write to Head Office.