

CARD SCHEME NEWSLETTER

NOVEMBER 1965

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL  
12 Crane Court, Fleet Street, LONDON EC4.

All those of our Card Scheme members who sent off cards on behalf of Professor Peng (Taiwanese prisoner mentioned in the October Newsletter) will be pleased to know that he has been released, together with the two other prisoners who were sentenced with him. The group in Sweden that had adopted Professor Peng received a letter from his brother in which he thanked all those members of Amnesty who had worked for Professor Peng's release.

The case of Zhenya Belov (October Newsletter) received much publicity in the "Guardian" and over 600 people wrote in asking how they could help.

After a period of silence, a letter, apparently from Belov's father, appeared in the "Guardian" correspondence column, claiming that Zhenya really was in the asylum for medical reasons. To this Peter Benenson replied, suggesting that a Western psychiatrist might be allowed to visit Zhenya to see for himself. No reply was received to this proposal, and publicity was stopped for a time in the hope that the Russians would quickly release Zhenya.

So as to harness public enthusiasm the "Zhenya Belov Appeal" was started outside Amnesty's sphere, and bulletins were sent to all the people who had previously written in, asking them to write to their M.P's, to the Soviet Government and to prominent people in general. On October 19th an article appeared in "Izvestia" denouncing the "Guardian" for the publicity it gave to the Belov affair, and saying that Peter Benenson was "unscrupulous"; Amnesty was mentioned, but not directly attacked. Subsequent to this, the Zhenya Belov Appeal Committee published a reply.

The membership of the Card Scheme continues to grow and we now have our first member in Guinea. Can we ask that members pass on to us any information that they may receive concerning the prisoners? Some of our members already do this but, for example, we would very much like to know whether there has been any reaction from the Algerian authorities concerning Mohamed Harbi (October Newsletter). We may not always be able to answer your letters as promptly as we would like because of the limited staff at the London office but you can be sure that any information you send us will be carefully noted.

SPYROS KOTSAKIS (GREECE).

Spyros Kotsakis has been in Greek jails for the last 10 years, and his health has now declined to his present desperately sick condition; he was recently moved to Aghios Pavlos Prison Hospital in Athens, he has now been moved back to Sotiria Prison Sanatorium, Athens. He is suffering from TB, and has only 2/3 of one lung left with which to breathe; Several ribs are missing, his heart is strained, and he has stomach and nervous disorders; in addition to all this, he has recently developed a toxic condition of the thyroid gland and is losing weight rapidly - 12 kilos in the last month.

There is, therefore, a clear case for his release on humanitarian grounds. The following outline of his case suggests that he is also perhaps a victim of injustice.

Kotsakis was Commander of the 1st Army Corps in ELAS during the Greek Resistance in 1939-45 war. (He was recently proposed for the medal 'Liberation of Athens' by the Athens city council. He fought on the losing side during the Greek Civil War, and is a member of the banned Greek Communist Party.

He was arrested in 1955 and tried in the civil courts for illegal political activities (under Law 509, an anti-communist measure), but was acquitted. Still held in jail, he was tried again in 1957, this time under Law 375, a measure against espionage brought in by the pre-war fascist dictator Metaxas; it established special courts martial, with the power to convict for 'intention to spy'. No proof of actual spying activity is needed (none was offered at Kotsakis' trial), and this law appears to have been used as a political weapon; it has been condemned by the International Commission of Jurists.

At this trial, Kotsakis was sentenced to death; this was later commuted to life imprisonment - which means exactly that in Greek law.

Mr. Papandreou's late Government had promised the repeal of Law 375 under which Kotsakis and 65 others are imprisoned - draft Bill had even been prepared. In the present political upheaval, their cases seem likely to be forgotten again. When next remembered, it may be too late for Kotsakis - thus the importance of his release now.

Send your appeals to:-

Additional appeals may be sent to:-

The King,  
Royal Palace,  
Athens.

Mr. Papaspyrou,  
Ministry of Justice,  
Piraeos Zinonos.  
Sokratous, Athens.

Encouragements to prisoner's wife: Mrs. Thetis Kotsaki, Room 13, Floor 8,  
Patisia Street, 14, Athens.

SHAIKH MUHAMMAD SALIM AL RUQAISHI, OMAN, (MUSCAT)

A most tragic and unjustifiable case of violations of human rights of modern times is that of Shaikh Muhammad Salim Al Ruqaishi, held in Fort Jalali Prison, Muscat, without trial since 1957 on the orders of the Sultan of Muscat, a principality of South-East Arabia.

There have been numerous detentions without trial of Omanis since the invasion of the interior of Oman by the Sultan of Muscat some 10 years ago. In 1957, when the attack on Oman by the Sultan's Armed Forces and some 500 Omani citizens were arrested. Among these were several well-known men from the legal, academic and religious professions whose views were known to be in sympathy with the elected system of the Omani Imamate, which these military operations aimed at overthrowing. These men were considered particularly "dangerous", because their views might undermine the autocratic position of most of the British-protected rulers of South Arabia, particularly the Sultan of Muscat.

Shaikh Al Ruqaishi is one of the most distinguished Omanis of modern times. Born in Izki in 1884, he soon established himself as a scholar of repute and rose to high office in the time of Imam Salim Al Kharusi (1913-1920). Under Muhammad Ibn Abdullah, the next Imam, he served as a High Court Judge and Governor of the Nakhl district. In 1922 the Sultan of Muscat sent troops to attack Nakhl, and Shaikh Al Ruqaishi held the fort of that town against a siege until he was relieved by the Imamate of Oman's army.

At various times of his life, Shaikh Al Ruqaishi served as a High Court Judge in the towns of Ibri, Adam, Izki and Nazwa. He reached the height of his career in the 1930's when he became a Cabinet Minister in Imam Muhammad's Government. He is known as one of the most learned men in Oman and is considered by scholars to be the greatest living expert on Omani Constitutional Law, a complex branch of learning with deep roots in history going back to 750 A.D. He is the author of several works on Constitutional Law as well as being a poet of high standing. He can well be described as a pillar of Omani society and a highly respected citizen.

Shaikh Al Ruqaishi was arrested around August 1957 and has been in prison ever since. He is now more than 80 years old, and finds prison life extremely arduous, particularly since he is confined in the notorious Fort Jalali dungeons in Muscat. He is held in a very cramped cell, which he is only allowed to leave once a day. At his age, he is exposed to continual danger of illness which might prove fatal. Medical facilities in the prison are non-existent, and the occupation authorities have forbidden the Red Cross and Red Crescent entry to Oman.

Shaikh Al Ruqaishi and his associates in prison from similar reputable professions have never been brought to trial or charged with any crime. Urgent action is required to save him from risk of death under these unhygienic and arduous conditions. It is totally unjustifiable that this very elderly man, who has had a long, distinguished career serving his people as a judge and statesman, should be treated worse than a common criminal merely because of a difference of opinion to that of the ruling Sultan.

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SHAIKH MUHAMMAD SALIM AL RUQAISHI cont./.

Send your appeal to the Sultan of Muscat,  
Royal Palace,  
Salala, Dhufar,  
Muscat, SOUTH ARABIA.

You can also send a copy of your appeal to George Thompson, (since Oman is still a British Protectorate) Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, Foreign Office, Whitehall, S.W.1.

RADU FLORESCU (RUMANIA)

In 1964, the Rumanian Government released more than 10,000 political prisoners; in May this year, one of the first known arrests since then took place when Radu Florescu was arrested with his wife while walking in a Bucharest street. Mr. Florescu has not yet been tried or charged and unless police practice has changed recently, it is likely that he is being held incommunicado during the period of interrogation - this has already lasted 5 months - which precedes appearance in court.

Radu Florescu is 64; he has already served two prison sentences. In 1950 while he was working as a lawyer at the American legation in Bucharest, he was arrested and sentenced on charges of having "western contacts". He returned to his work at the American legation after his release in 1954, but in 1958 he was again arrested - this time with his son, daughter and daughter in law. He was found guilty of "economic offences" and sentenced to a second term of imprisonment; the exact details of the indictment are not known, but no mention of any political activity was made trial and one count cited the discovery of two packets of Western cigarettes in the daughter's handbag when she was leaving her father's flat. On his release, Mr. Florescu was served with a Government order compelling him to live outside Bucharest, in the Baraghan, a remote rural area in the East of the country. He returned to Bucharest in the Autumn of 1964.

Mr. Florescu and his wife are known to be Roman Catholics; moreover Sylvia Florescu served a prison sentence herself because of her religion.

Letters should be written to: Minister of Justice, Adrian Dimitriv,  
Ministry of Justice,  
Bucharest, Rumania.

They should emphasise the good record of the Rumanian Government in its release of political prisoners.