

# monthly newsletter from amnesty international

## postcards for prisoners campaign

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SEPTEMBER 1968

Here is some news about former prisoners:

Low Tai Thong, Singapore (March 1968 Newsletter). It now seems that our efforts to arrange for Mr Low's release in order to study in England may at last prove successful. We have heard from the British government, which is acting as an intermediary, that provided assurances are given that Mr Low will be admitted to study at an English university, that his expenses will be covered during his stay in England and that on completion of his course he will go to live in Sweden, the Singapore government is prepared to release him.

Jan Benes, Czechoslovakia (July 1967 Newsletter). Members may be interested to know that Jan Benes escaped to Paris from Czechoslovakia with his family. He will be speaking at a meeting being organised in Amsterdam this month by the Dutch Section and will also be interviewed on Dutch television.

Caroline Okello-Odongo, Kenya (January 1967 Newsletter). The two groups which have adopted Mrs Okello-Odongo have at last been given permission by the Kenyan authorities to write to her in prison and have received the following reply:

"Thank you very much for your kind letter of 27th May on behalf of a West German Women's group of Amnesty International.

I am doing well and am so comfortable, perhaps, as one can expect to be in prisons. Much of the time is spent reading or doing needlework. There does not appear to be any problems with the family at home and I receive money and books from them from time to time.

I am most grateful for the concern shown by your group. Please give give them my best regards and I wish you success in your work." This is the first news that has been heard of Mrs Okello-Odongo since her arrest in August 1966.

Dr. Howard Levy, U.S.A. (July 1967 Newsletter) We have received a letter from Dr. Levy's defence counsel telling us that the conditions in which he is held have improved. He is no longer in solitary confinement. He still awaits the decision of the Military Board of Review. If the decision should be negative, his case will be taken to the Court of Military Appeals.

Professor Sukirno, Indonesia (July 1968 Newsletter). Members will be sad to learn that Professor Sukirno died in prison during July.

Demetrio Vallejo Martinez, Mexico (December 1966 Newsletter). With the Olympic Games opening in Mexico City on October 12th, this may be a good time for members to renew appeals on behalf of this prisoner. Send your appeals either to the Mexican Government representative in your country or to the Presidente de la Republica Mexicana, Lic. Gustavo Diaz Ordaz, Palacio Nacional, Mexico City 1. DF, MEXICO.

Here are this month's prisoners:

Joaquim Augusto dos Santos, Portugal

Joaquim Augusto dos Santos is a 33-year-old labourer from Couco and was arrested in April 1964. He was tried some 6 months later and sentenced to 5½ years with security measures. The charge was membership of the Communist Party and, therefore, subversion. The fixed period of imprisonment is due to end in October 1969, but dos Santos will be subject to security measures after that; in practice this means that he can be detained indefinitely if the authorities still consider him a security risk.

The traditional Communist Party in Portugal advocates propaganda, strike action and peaceful evolution. During the last 40 years there has been virtually no evidence of even the mildest sabotage on their part. In 1963 a rival pro-China movement was set up - the Front for Popular Action (F.A.P.). This does advocate violence and its members are not normally Amnesty cases.

Conditions for political prisoners in Portugal are bad. Joaquim dos Santos is in Peniche, a prison with one of the worst reputations in the country. The sentence is divided into three periods: observation, solitary confinement and life in community with other prisoners. During the so-called 'observation' period the prisoner is kept in isolation and subjected to frequent searches. The period of solitary confinement can continue for years and almost half of the prison population is kept under these conditions. In addition the diet is inadequate and many of the prisoners in Peniche suffer from diseases caused by dietary deficiencies. The situation is described as worsening and threats, provocation and punishments occur frequently. At the end of the fixed period of imprisonment the prisoners may be detained at the discretion of the police who submit reports on each prisoner. If a person is considered dangerous he may be detained for a further period of from 6 months to 3 years and at the end of that time may be detained yet again. Joaquim Augusto dos Santos's wife is also in prison. The family is very poor and in need of help.

When writing we suggest that you press for dos Santos to be released at the end of his 5½ year sentence i.e. in October 1969, and for improvements in the conditions of imprisonment.

Send your card to:

EITHER

Prof. Doutor Joao de Matos  
Antunes Varela,

Ministerio de Justica,

Rua do Arsenal,

Lisboa 2,

PORTUGAL.

OR

The Portuguese Ambassador or Diplomatic  
Representative in your own country.

Barbara Torunczyk, Poland.

In March this year thousands of students in Warsaw and other major Polish cities demonstrated against the banning of a play called "Dziady" (Ancestors) by the famous Polish playwright Mickiewicz. This play, which had already run for several weeks in a Warsaw theatre, has anti-Russian overtones and the government, concerned at the effect that these were having on theatre audiences, ordered the presentation of the play to be stopped. Following the student demonstrations, which reflected a growing concern at the erosion of liberty in Poland, 367 students from various colleges of higher education all over the country were arrested. Of these 173 were later released because of lack of evidence, while the rest have either been sentenced and are serving prison sentences, or are still awaiting trial. In Warsaw 11 people considered to be leaders of the student revolt are believed to be in Mokotow Prison. One of these is a Polish girl in her twenties called Barbara Torunczyk. Very little is known about her except that she has apparently been singled out for ill-treatment. She was first subjected to an unspecified kind of humiliation under interrogation and then left naked in solitary confinement until she contracted pneumonia and had to be transferred to hospital.

Amnesty hopes to send an observer to the trial of Barbara Torunczyk and the other students whenever it takes place, although it will probably be difficult to obtain advance notice of the proceedings. According to reports, they will be charged under Article 64, paragraph 2, of the Polish Penal Code, which states: "Whoever takes part in an assembly or gathering, the purpose of which is to commit an offence, is liable for imprisonment for up to 2 years. Whoever organises or presides over such an assembly or gathering is liable for imprisonment for up to 5 years." There is a second possibility that the leaders of the students' revolt may have to answer charges under the so-called Minor Penal Code which was supposed to apply to the immediate post-War period only. This states: "Whoever belongs to an association, the existence and structure and aims of which are to be kept secret from state authorities, is liable for imprisonment for up to 15 years."

Send your cards to:

EITHER

Wladyslaw Gomulka,  
First Secretary of the Polish United  
Workers Party,

Ul. Nowy Swiat 6,  
Warszawa,  
POLAND.

OR

The Minister of the Interior,  
Ministerstwo Spraw Wewnetrznych P.R.L.,  
Rakowicka 2,  
Warszawa,  
POLAND.

Victor Rico Galan, Mexico.

A journalist by profession, Galan, before his arrest was editor of the leading opposition paper in Mexico. He was well-known for his courageous criticism of government policy of which he did not approve.

Rico Galan was arrested together with 32 other people on 12th August 1966 on charges of subversive activities under the Law of Social Dissolution. This law which has been much criticised by the legal profession in Mexico and by

the press of all political opinion, was passed in 1941 and is extremely wide in scope. Under its provisions people can be held in detention for offences which have only been vaguely defined. It has been argued that the law violates about 10 articles of the Mexican Constitution.

In a statement published in the press at the time of the arrests, the police claimed that they had been watching those arrested for some time and that after a raid had found them engaging in physical training. They also claimed that they had found one or two transmitters and various small arms. They named Victor Rico Galan and a man called Raul Ugalde as leaders of the group. However a highly reputable Mexican lawyer, a specialist in Latin American Affairs and international justice who had worked with the International Commission of Jurists for two or three years, interpreted the arrests (in a letter written to Amnesty) as a government manoeuvre to "stifle" the courageous criticism which Rico Galan has been making for some time. Rico Galan was in fact singled out and held in solitary confinement - the only one of the group to be subjected to such treatment. We have not been able to ascertain the details of the sentence imposed on Mr Galan.

When writing to the Mexican government we suggest that you express your concern at the detention of Victor Rico Galan under a law which has been so widely criticised.

Send your cards to:

EITHER

Presidente de la Republica Mexicana  
Lic. Gustavo Diaz Ordaz,  
Palacio Nacional,  
Mexico 1. DF,  
MEXICO

OR

The Mexican Ambassador or Diplomatic  
Representative in your own country.

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Note for British Members

The change in the postal rates will mean that it is as cheap to send a letter abroad as a post-card (air letter card 9d). We feel that individual members should make their own decision as to which they prefer to use.

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Victor Rico Galan, Mexico.

A journalist by profession, Galan, before his arrest was editor of the leading opposition paper in Mexico. He was well-known for his courageous criticism of government policy of which he did not approve. Rico Galan was arrested together with 25 other people on 12th August 1960 on charges of subversive activities under the law of Social Dissolution. This law which has been much criticised by the legal profession in Mexico and by