

monthly newsletter from amnesty international



postcards for prisoners campaign

FEBRUARY 1970

First some news about prisoners who have been on this Campaign:

Ben Jennet Mohammed, Tunisia (October 1968). Ben Jennet Mohammed is one of the prisoners who have benefited from the amnesty announced by the Tunisian Government. It is assumed that he is now free but we are asking the Group which has his case to confirm this.

Fernanda Paiva Tomaz, Portugal (April 1969), is reported to have been released in October.

Angel Cuadra Landrove, Cuba (December 1969). The German Section is preparing a special card campaign for this prisoner.

Abu Mayanja, Uganda (1968). In the months before the assassination attempt on President Obote's life in December Mr. Mayanja's family were allowed to visit him in prison and it is known that his treatment was much improved. However, since December all visits have been stopped and no communication of any kind is allowed. All the political prisoners have been subject to the same restrictions since the assassination attempt, although there is no suggestion that any of them were in any way involved.

Po Yang, Formosa (December 1969). We gather from recent information that Po Yang, who is not a staff member of a newspaper but a contributor, was sentenced by a military tribunal in July 1969 to 12 years imprisonment on charges of "subversive activities". We understand that the charges did not relate to anything he had written.

Alfonso Carlos Comin, Spain (March 1969). The Spanish writer Alfonso Carlos Comin who began to serve a 16 month sentence in October 1969 has been pardoned by General Franco and was released in January 1970.

Mihajlo Mihajlov, Yugoslavia (November 1966), is due to be released on March 4th.

THIS MONTH'S PRISONERS

King Mosheshoe the Second, LESOTHO

The first General Election in Lesotho since Independence took place in January 1970. (See background sheet for notes on recent political history). On Friday, January 30,

when it became clear that the Government Party, the BNP, had lost the elections, Chief Jonathan Leabua, the Prime Minister, assumed personal power. He suspended the Constitution and declared a State of Emergency. (There is a real danger that South Africa may intervene even more directly than before in supporting Chief Jonathan as a puppet ruler).

The King, the constitutional Head of State, was placed under house arrest, and leading members of the BCP and MFP (the former opposition parties which had now become the legal Government) were arrested. It is the King's prerogative as Head of State to ask the representative of the majority party which has won the election to accept the post of Prime Minister and form the new Government.

Constantine Bereng Seeiso (Mosheshoe), who is now 31, was installed as Paramount Chief in 1960. The hereditary ruler's title was changed to King under the 1960 Constitution which took the country into independence from Britain in 1966. He is a direct descendent of the famous founding Chief of the Basotho.

A Catholic, Mosheshoe was educated at a Catholic public school in England and then at Oxford University, but returned to Lesotho to take up the Paramount Chieftancy before he completed his studies at Oxford. Well-educated and intelligent, his political attitudes are radical and nationalist, and it is known that he has not been a strong supporter of Chief Jonathan, whose reliance on South African aid and influence has made him suspect to black African states.

The MFP, a splinter party of the larger BCP, has always been strongly royalist, although more radical than the BCP. The King has come into conflict with Chief Jonathan on more than one occasion since the BNP came into power, and this is not the first time that he has been placed under house arrest.

The mass of the people support the King in his role as Paramount Chief and, potentially, he is the one figure who could eventually unite Lesotho, either as a free constitutional monarch or as the executive Head. His personal popularity stems from his youth, his interest in sport and his easy informality. A small group, which would still support him as Paramount Chief, are a little dubious because of his involvement in current politics, and possibly because of old, tangled succession problems. There is no doubt, however, of the loyalty of the great majority of the Basotho people, and his detention is resented widely. Feeling on this issue is such that the loyalty of the police to Chief Jonathan will not be at all certain if the King remains in detention and the political situation worsens. He has in fact become the key figure in the present political crisis.

Members should urge that constitutional rule be restored and authority returned to the legal and constitutional Head of State, in order to enable him to fulfil his constitutional role in calling on the Party which has won the elections to form the new Government.

Cards should be sent to: EITHER

Chief Leabua Jonathan,
Maseru,
Lesotho.

OR

Philip 'Mabathoana,
Lesotho High Commission,
Sergoit Lane,
P.O. Box 4096
Kenya.

(Mr. 'Mabathoana is the roving Ambassador for Lesotho in all the African and Arab states).

Farrokh Negahdar, IRAN

Now aged 23, Farrokh Negahdar was a student at Tehran Polytechnic before his arrest in 1968. He was one of fourteen graduates and intellectuals sentenced in January 1969 on charges of planning the overthrow of the Government and forming a communist political group.

The trial was by court martial and an Amnesty observer was present throughout. No evidence was brought to substantiate the charge that Negahdar was a member or even a supporter of the Tudeh (communist) Party, which is a proscribed organisation. Nor was there any evidence that he had conspired against the Government. The Prosecution also failed to prove any connection between Negahdar and the other accused, except that one or two of them were known to him as casual acquaintances.

In court Negahdar described his efforts to establish student organisations which would work to improve living conditions in the universities. He also spoke of a letter he had written to the Prime Minister urging university reform. He denied belonging to any group that opposed the Government. Despite the flimsy nature of the Prosecution case, Negahdar was convicted and sentenced to five years' imprisonment.

His arrest should probably be seen against a background of student demonstrations and unrest during the spring and early summer of 1968. These were at first discouraged and even suppressed at times by the Government. In August, however (that is, between the time of Negahdar's arrest and the date of his trial) there was a change of policy. A number of University Chancellors and Vice Chancellors were replaced, and the Prime Minister actually asked for the formation of student organisations to represent student interests.

Had Negahdar been tried in a normally constituted civilian court, this change in official attitude would presumably have been pressed by the Defence and taken into account in the judgment.

Send your cards to: EITHER

General Mobasser,
Army Headquarters,
Department of Military Prosecutor,
Tehran.

OR

The Iranian Ambassador in your
country (or the nearest Iranian
Ambassador).

(Note: An amnesty was announced for 10th December 1969 in Iran, but so far no list has been published giving the names of prisoners freed).

Dusko Mirksic, YUGOSLAVIA

Mirksic, now serving his 5th year in prison, is one of the score or more conscientious objectors imprisoned in Yugoslavia. He is a member of the Nazarene sect, a small religious body (allied to the Apostolic Church in the United States) which encourages its members as part of its doctrine to refuse to serve with weapons. This means that such objectors accept the principle of conscription

as part of a citizen's duty, but their conscience forbids the carrying-out of any duties involving weaponry.

The Yugoslav authorities refuse to recognise such a distinction between general and partial objection to military service and dissenters are charged with refusal to perform military service. The Government defends its action on the grounds that the Yugoslav Constitution states that membership of any religious minority cannot and must not affect realisation of the rights and obligations of a citizen. It is aided in this attitude by the general acceptance within Yugoslavia of military service, by recent history and by the ignorance of many Yugoslavs of the plight of conscientious objectors. (Objectors normally serve only for a day or so before being faced with the demand to bear weapons. Thus few of their fellow conscripts hear of their subsequent arrest and trial by court martial. Moreover, the numbers involved -- about 20 are imprisoned at any one time -- are so small as to escape public notice).

Mirksic's case is particularly serious. Before 1960 it was the general practice to re-conscript objectors on their release from jail and on their repeated refusal to bear arms, to re-try and re-sentence them. Indeed one man served four prison sentences for conscientious objection. This policy ceased after 1960 but seems to have been re-introduced following the Soviet occupation of Czechoslovakia in August 1968. Mirksic is in fact serving a second term of imprisonment.

Some time after August 1968 he was sentenced to five years' imprisonment, having already served a three-year sentence on Goli Otok Island for conscientious objection. The authorities justify their action in this particular case by pointing out that the prisoner failed to obtain the necessary 'relieving certificate'. This certificate exempts objectors from military service after an initial sentence. However, the explanation given seems not to be the real one. It is more likely that Mirksic is a victim of the new, harder policy adopted by the Government. Recent purges of the Communist Party, interference with magazines and harassment of journalists indicate that Mirksic is a specific case in a generally worsening situation.

Cards should be sent to: EITHER

The Federal Secretary of the Interior, OR
Mr. Radovan Stijacic,
Kneza Milosa 100,
Belgrade, Yugoslavia.

Your local or nearest Yugoslav
Embassy.

LESOTHO

A small, mountainous enclave of South Africa with a population of a million, virtually all of whom are Southern Sotho, Lesotho was a British protectorate from 1868 to 1966 when it became an independent monarchy within the Commonwealth. Its economic dependence on South Africa is a product of its geographic position and its poverty, which forces large numbers to seek work in the mines and farms of South Africa.

British colonial administration did little to develop the country (formerly known as Basutoland) since it was assumed it would be incorporated into its neighbour. This idea was vigorously opposed by the Basotho.

The first internal election in 1960 led to an overwhelming victory in the National Council for Ntsu Mokhele's Congress Party (PCP), the radical organ of nationalist anti-colonial feeling, and first of the political parties, which has since been accused by the South Africans and internal opponents of having strong communist links. However, the self-rule elections of 1965 produced a surprising, narrow victory for Chief Leabua Jonathan's National Party (B.N.P.), a conservative party relying for its support on the smaller chiefs, the more backward mountain areas, and the powerful Catholic Church.

The Paramount Chief, Moshoeshoe II, became constitutional head of state at Independence in 1966, but has had a running dispute with the Government since then over the precise role of the Monarch. The King has always wanted more executive power.

The Jonathan Government has increased reliance on South Africa, especially in the legal and industrial fields, and Pretoria has been well satisfied with its "client". South African political refugees have been harassed by the Government because of assumed collaboration with the opposition, a further feature of the communist scare tactics being used. Chief Jonathan has often talked of a one-party state and has on occasion detained opposition leaders, severely restricted the King and deported refugees. He is a great friend and admirer of Dr. Banda of Malawi.

On January 30, when the first post-Independence elections seemed to be going in favour of the Congress Party, Chief Jonathan seized total power by suspending the constitution and declaring a State of Emergency, detaining fifteen or more opposition leaders, including Mokhele and placing the King under house arrest, divested of all his constitutional powers. He publicly admitted acting illegally but alleged that this was "in the interests of the country". Both South Africa and Britain have, for different reasons, expressed concern at this move and it seems likely ("Times", London 4.2.70) that Britain may not recognise the new regime.

Chief Jonathan commands a minority of support within the country, probably less than 30% (one of the factors in the poor showing of the BNP in the elections was the deep internal splits within the party and even within the Cabinet) and the future depends heavily on the loyalty of the armed police units. The reaction of international bodies such as the O.A.U. and U.N., as well as South Africa and Britain could also influence the outcome.