

monthly newsletter from amnesty international



postcards for prisoners campaign

JULY 1970

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

S. Jusu-Sheriff - Sierra Leone (December 1968). S. Jusu-Sheriff, former Parliamentary leader of the Sierra Leone People's Party, who was first arrested in November 1968 at the time of the disturbances in the Bonthe area in Sierra Leone, is about to be brought to trial on charges of inciting persons against the party in power, the All Peoples' Congress. Mr. Jusu-Sheriff was amongst those persons detained from November 1968 until February 1969 under the Emergency Regulations. Shortly after his release from detention he was arrested and subsequently charged with incitement. He and three other prominent defendants facing similar charges have been released on bail for some months and expect to be brought to trial early in August. The trial takes place at a time when two other trials, both involving treason charges, and an appeal hearing concerning the ten death sentences passed at a recently-concluded treason trial are either underway or about to begin. Due to the conduct of the first treason trial and the reported prison conditions under which those convicted were held, Amnesty is taking an active interest in the Sierra Leone proceedings.

Dr. Zhores Medvedev - USSR (June 1970). Dr. Medvedev was released from the Kaluga psychiatric clinic on June 16th. This followed protests from eminent Soviet scientists like Andrei Sakharov and Pyotr Kapitans and the writers Alexander Tvardovsky and Alexander Solzhenitsyn. A meeting was arranged at the Ministry of Health where scientists confronted the Minister of Health and a psychiatrist who claimed that Dr. Medvedev was suffering from "pathological psychopathy". Nevertheless Dr. Medvedev was released and this is very encouraging as a sign of how pressure within the USSR can work. We are sorry if some Campaign members were led into sending cards which would have arrived after Dr. Medvedev's release but we were unfortunately not able to notify everybody in time.

Noureddine Ben Khader - Tunisia (July 1969). Mr. Ben Khader, although officially released at the end of March is still under restriction. (Write to the Minister of the Interior, Ahmed Mestiri, Ministere de l'Interieur, Tunis, asking why Mr. Ben Khader is still being kept under restriction after being released.

Mohammed Ben Jennet - Tunisia (October 1968). Since Mr. Ben Jennet's release in January this year, he was under restriction. At the beginning of June, however, we heard that the restriction order had been lifted. We have asked his Group to obtain official confirmation of this.

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This month's prisoners:-Alfredo ACORTA - PARAGUAY

Born in 1914, Alfredo Acorta was an accountant by profession. In 1958 he was arrested, accused of being a communist and sentenced to a year's imprisonment. When his sentence expired, however, he was not released and no explanation has ever been given for his continued imprisonment.

He is held in a cell for long-term prisoners in the prison linked to the 3rd police station (Comisaria Seccional 3) in the centre of Asuncion. Ten prisoners share a cell said to measure 3 by 4 metres. Washing facilities consist of a small tin can in the cell itself. Prisoners rarely leave the cell and Mr. Acorta has not left his cell or even seen sunlight for six years. Like many of the other prisoners he has lost all his teeth as a result of insufficient food and vitamins. He also suffers seriously from glaucoma, which can lead to loss of eyesight. The authorities have refused to have him examined by a doctor, and his wife has not been allowed to give him the medicines he requested. He can speak to his wife for a maximum of five minutes every Sunday morning, in the presence of a guard and separated from her by two sets of bars. When their son reached the age of 18 the authorities refused to allow him to visit his father any more.

Cards pleading for the release of Alfredo Acorta on the basis of the expiry of his sentence should be sent to:

EITHER

President Alfredo Stroessner,
Asuncion,
Paraguay.

OR

The Paraguayan Embassy in your own country.

Hornisdas MBANDA - RWANDA

Hornisdas Mbanda was a respected Tutsi chief in the old kingdom of Rwanda, which, before Independence, was under Belgian trusteeship. Rwanda, a small, impoverished and over-populated central African state lying between the Congo and East Africa, was a feudal monarchy. The society was a caste society in which the majority people, the Bahutu, were dominated by the Batutsi, who formed roughly one-tenth of the population. Immediately prior to Independence, the Belgian Government switched their support from the Batutsi to the Bahutu, thereby indirectly contributing to the civil war between the two which overtook the plans for independence in 1959. The Bahutu rising was accompanied by massacres of Batutsi and a major exodus of most of the Batutsi population to surrounding countries. It is estimated that a minimum of twelve thousand people were killed at this time.

Mbanda remained loyal to the Mwami (King) during the revolution and was later accused of having organised the assassination by pygmy mercenaries of a Hutu leader who fled into neighbouring Burundi.

He was sentenced to death but, on appeal, his sentence was commuted to life imprisonment. Early in 1960, he was placed in solitary confinement in a specially constructed prison for political offenders adjoining the main prison at Ruhengeri in the north of Rwanda, and has remained there ever since. In 1962, at the time of Independence, the United Nations Trusteeship Council recommended to the Belgians that all political prisoners should be released. All were released except for Mbanda and another prisoner, who was also taken up by Amnesty. The latter was released in 1967.

It was decided to adopt Mbanda because the evidence against him was unsubstantiated. He was tried by a military court and it would seem that his arrest was primarily a penalty for his loyalty to his king.

He is now comparatively well-treated in prison although his health has suffered. He is no longer in solitary confinement and is allowed to receive letters and parcels. He occupies his time teaching the other prisoners religion and languages (he is a devout and practising Catholic). His wife and children are living in a refugee camp in Tanzania.

Rwanda has recently celebrated the tenth anniversary of the Declaration of the Republic. The country now seems peaceful, except for occasional raids by Tutsi refugee bands from across the border. The present government is popular.

Send you cards to:

EITHER

President Gregoire Kayibanda,
The Presidency,
Cigali,
Rwanda.

OR

The Representative to the U.N. from Rwanda,
His Excellency Fidel Nkundagenzi,
United Nations,
New York 10017,
U.S.A.

Jacek KURON and Karel MODZELEWSKI - POLAND

Before their first arrest in 1965 Kuron and Modzelewski were assistant lecturers at Warsaw University. Both are in their thirties and come from Communist family backgrounds. The reason for their arrest was a political manifesto which they wrote entitled "An Open Letter to the Party". This made several criticisms of the Polish Government and advocated real control over the means of production by the workers. Kuron received three years' imprisonment, Modzelewski three and a half, having been convicted of preparing and distributing material containing "false" information about social and political conditions in Poland. In March 1967 they were chosen for the Postcards for Prisoners Campaign. Kuron was released in April and Modzelewski the following October.

Meanwhile student unrest had been growing, first in Warsaw and then later in other university towns. In March 1968 the play "Forefathers" by the nineteenth century playwright Mickiewicz was banned after a short run, after certain passages had led

to anti-Soviet interpretations by the audience. This was the spark which set the student revolt alight. After petitions and demonstrations, there were clashes with the police; the Ministry of Culture was attacked by a mob of students and ransacked. Thousands of arrests followed all over the country and there were numerous complaints of wrongful arrest and ill-treatment. Most were later released with the exception of a few students of Jewish origin held to be "ringleaders". Kuron (not Jewish) and Modzelewski (Jewish) were arrested and put on trial with them. They were found guilty of "participation in a movement which, based on a political programme established by them and hostile to the Polish People's Republic, was aimed at fermenting public demonstration against the State." They were sentenced to three and a half years' imprisonment each.

Kuron and Modzelewski were not involved in violence - it was not mentioned in the charges and there is no other evidence that they were. The fact that they received the heaviest sentences probably can be traced back to their co-authorship of the "Open Letter". Their arrest and trial was exploited by an extremely unpleasant campaign in the Polish mass media, which maintained that unrest in Poland had been engineered by Polish Jews, aided by the world Zionist movement.

In July 1969 an amnesty was declared on the 25th anniversary of the Polish People's Republic, but Kuron and Modzelewski were excluded from it on the grounds that they were "recidivists". Today they are still in prison - Modzelewski in Wroclaw province and Kuron near Poznan. Unlike Modzelewski, Kuron has not been allowed to continue academic study in prison.

Send your cards to:

EITHER

Rada Panstwa P.R.L.,
Warszawa,
Poland.

OR

Wydzial Penitencjarny,
Ministerstwo Sprawiedliwosci,
Warszawa,
ul. Wjazdowskie.

(This is the central prison authority. Cards sent here could request that Kuron be granted permission to continue his academic work in prison).