

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

Turnagain Lane, Farringdon Street, London E.C.4.

NEWSLETTER FOR GROUPS (No.1)

February 1969

We have decided to revive the Newsletter for Groups and will in future be sending this out to groups with AIR. As it will carry requests that we have specifically been asked to pass on to groups (see note on ICFTU and ICRC page 2), we do ask that all groups read it carefully.

SWEDISH GROUP (25) which has an adopted Russian prisoner would like to organise a joint action on behalf of Russian prisoners. Would all groups with prisoners in the USSR please contact Mrs. Astrid Fahlen, Trumslagarg. 12, 22239 Lund, Sweden.

BAPTIST PRISONERS IN THE SOVIET UNION

The Slav Mission, an evangelical organisation in Stockholm has published a list of imprisoned Baptists in the Soviet Union. This list is very interesting as in most cases it gives additional background information about the prisoners, including the addresses of their place of imprisonment and the addresses of their relatives. The list also shows that the labour camps in which they are held are scattered over a large area of the Soviet Union.

As well over a hundred groups are involved, it would be very laborious to send individual Extra Information Sheets for each prisoner. We would, therefore, like to suggest that you write individually to the Slav Mission asking for a copy of this list (they have undertaken to send the list to Amnesty groups). The address is as follows: Slaviska Missionen, Västmannagatan 30¹, Stockholm, Sweden.

Unfortunately, the list is in Russian, which will undoubtedly impose problems for some groups. If you are really unable to find anyone to translate the information for you, by all means write and ask for help. It should be remembered, nevertheless, that the list may well be reprinted in English in some periodical before very long. If you find that in the case of your prisoner the address of his or her nearest relative is given, this gives you the opportunity to write to them directly. It is, of course, possible that correspondence will be interfered with and you will not receive a reply. There is one other possibility of making contact and that is by sending them a gift through the official foreign trade organisation, Vneshvosyltorg, which has representatives in most countries. Their address can probably be obtained from the Soviet Embassy. The Agents will send you a brochure of goods for sale and you will be invited to order articles for which you pay in the currency of your country. The gifts are then delivered from a central store in Moscow and you must receive a receipt of delivery or get your money back.

At one time it was even possible to send gifts to prisoners in the camps through Vneshvosyltorg but, as from the beginning of 1968, orders were refused on the grounds that Post Box numbers (nearly all labour camps have Post Box addresses) could not be accepted. In the case of relatives, their addresses do not normally contain Post Box numbers and there should therefore be no difficulty.

ICFTU and International Red Cross

The International Confederation of Free Trade Unions has again asked that Amnesty Sections, Groups and individual members should not write directly to them. If you think the ICFTU might be able to help your prisoner, please consult the Secretariat first.

Similarly the International Committee of the Red Cross in Geneva prefer all enquiries from Amnesty to be routed through the Secretariat. Some National Red Cross Societies however are able to help groups. Please seek the advice of the Secretariat before getting in touch with any Red Cross Society.

RHODESIA

There are about 400 Africans in restriction in Rhodesia, and about 150 in detention. None of them have been charged, tried or convicted.

Many of those in restriction are adopted by Amnesty Groups. Some of them have been restricted for 5 years and now face another term of 5 years.

The majority are at Gonakudzingwa - 4 camps on the borders of Mocambique, 400 miles from Salisbury, an arid, desolate spot, with no trees and no shade. Restricttees are housed in galvanised structures, scorchingly hot in summer and icy cold in winter. They sleep on the floor, on felt mats with a couple of blankets for covering - no pillows, sheets or mattress. Many suffer from a painful tropical ^{eye} disease, which may be caused by lack of vitamins, and may explain the numerous requests for spectacles.

Restricttees are issued with rations which they cook themselves. They include mealie meal, tea, sugar, powdered milk, vegetables, and meat three times a week. They are said to be adequate from a health point of view but are monotonous; the meat is often of poor quality and there is no fresh fruit.

There is no library and no recreation facilities. Restricttees get through the long days by studying. Correspondence courses are arranged and books ordered through a Prison Education Committee. In summer it is often too hot to study by day, and there are no lights at night. Many restricttees are studying for the London G.C.E. or post-graduate courses.

A doctor visits periodically, but if a restricttee is seriously ill permission has to be obtained from the Minister for him to leave the area to visit hospital and this causes a long delay.

Restricttees are allowed to receive and to write any number of letters within reason: they are censored and political matters or camp conditions may not be discussed. Writing paper and stamps have to be paid for. Letters and picture postcards from overseas cause great pleasure and are passed round and read many times. A restricttee may spend a whole day composing his reply, helped by his interested friends. Magazines and newspapers are allowed to be received provided that they do not contain articles on Rhodesia. Comics are in demand.

Restricttees are allowed money and this is a real necessity. The restricttee has to buy his writing material, oil for lamps at night if he wishes to study, extra food, toilet requisites. Money also gives him status.

Permission must be obtained for a wife to visit. She and the children are housed in special quarters, under guard, and searched on arrival and before departure. The cost of the fare from Salisbury to Gona is under £5. She travels 3rd Class and must buy food for the journey. A Group can do a real service to their restrictee by paying the fare so that he can see his family.

In theory the government must supply clothing, but this does not always work out in practice, and there are delays. Restricttees may receive clothing, sent through Christian Care. A good warm overcoat would do also as an extra covering at night.

A group can help to alleviate the hardships of their adopted restrictee by writing to him, sending newspapers, magazines, comics, pocket money, clothing, helping to pay for his study course, for glasses if he needs them - and don't forget the Christmas Card - yours may be the only one he gets. His mental strain will be relieved if he knows that his family is receiving maintenance money. Many of the families live in rural areas and have suffered much through the long and severe drought. The children need decent clothes in which to attend school or may be refused admission, school fees have to be paid. The wife can be helped to visit her husband, or the mother her son.

Although letters to the Rhodesia government go unacknowledged, Groups should continue to write and appeal for the release of restricttees, and try to get influential Rhodesians to take up the case with the Minister of Justice, Law and Order.

Sechaba, Vol. 2 No. 12, December 1968 contains an excellent article on the conditions of restricttees, detainees and prisoners in Rhodesia - obtainable from African National Congress, 49 Rathbone Street, London W.1.

Parcels to Rhodesia - Please note that parcels for the family of your Rhodesian prisoner should no longer be sent to the Social Concerns Committee at P.O. Park Meadowlands, Salisbury, but should be sent to Christian Care, P.O.Box 444, Salisbury. Please write "second-hand clothing" on the outside and put the name and address of the family or restrictee / detainee to whom it is to be given, inside the parcel.

SOUTH AFRICA

The majority of Africans are on Robben Island where contact with the outside world is reduced to the minimum, and prison conditions are stringent, often brutal. The prisoner can be helped indirectly, however, if he knows that his family is receiving maintenance money. The children's school fees have to be paid (there is no free education for African children) and the rent met or the family can be sent away. The wives will travel the 1,000 odd miles to the island to visit their husbands if they can get permission and money for the fare. Prisoners can be helped on their release, when they are invariably banned and endorsed out to a 'transit camp'.

Sechaba, Vol. 2 No. 12, December 1968 and Anti-Apartheid News, Dec./Jan. 1969 both contain vivid descriptions of life on Robben Island and in Pretoria Central Prison, written by ex-political prisoners. Obtainable from A.N.C., 49 Rathbone Street, London W.1. and A.A.N., 89 Charlotte Street, London W.1.

PAKISTAN

The Agartala trial's legality has been challenged by the defence, and a decision is expected in February. If the trial is ruled illegal the military accused may be tried by court martial, and the civilians are expected to be detained under the Defence of Pakistan Rules. The trial so far appears to have been very unfair. Please write to your prisoners, expressing the hope that they are receiving a fair trial, and asking them to write to you.

GROUP INFORMATION SHEETS - You will have noticed that the new Group Information Sheets carry the words 'Security Classification' at the top. In the past Case Sheets and Extra Information Sheets have been marked 'Confidential'. This gave the impression that all the information contained in them was confidential, when it was included mainly to protect individual contacts whose names might be mentioned.

In future the three classifications will be:-

1. OPEN: Information can be used freely, and may be published if desired.
2. RESTRICTED: Information should not be published, but may be disclosed to Amnesty members, reliable contacts, etc.
3. CONFIDENTIAL: Access should be limited to people who really need to know. This will be used only for information which would cause serious harm if it were disclosed, such as names of contacts at risk, proposals for visits to dangerous countries, etc.

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Geochon, Vol. 2 No. 12, December 1988 and Anti-Apartheid News, Dec/Jan 1989 both contain vivid descriptions of life on Robben Island and in Pretoria Central Prison, written by ex-political prisoners. Obtainable from A.W.G., 49 Rathbone Street, London W.1, and A.A.W., 89 Charlotte Street, London W.1.