

No.4: ADOPT A PRISONER CAMPAIGN

There are about 6,000 people in prison today in Chile. The vast majority are ordinary workers and students who have committed no crime other than to be supporters of the constitutional government of President Allende. They are packed into overcrowded cells in prison camps which have sprung up all over the country. They are left for years without charges or tried by military courts that make no pretensions to justice. They are tortured with electric shocks and subjected to sexual perversions of all kinds. Their families are left without support and suffer more than any in the deep economic crisis raging in Chile at the moment.

You can help by taking on the case of a prisoner through the local branch of your union, and fighting for his or her release and fair treatment. The Chile Committee for Human Rights has been running a campaign of adoption since early 1975, and there are already over 40 trade union branches and trades councils taking part. NALGO has been particularly successful and has helped to gain the release of two people who are now safe in Britain. The following extract from a letter from a prisoner's wife shows the impact of the Campaign in Chile:

*"We would like to express our gratitude for the concern shown for the political prisoners in Chile. Let us hope that many organisations and governments all over the world will come to be aware of the genocide that is taking place in Chile, and help us to get rid of Pinochet and his ghastly band, the scourge of humanity".*

What are the aims of the campaign?

The final aim is to see all prisoners set free in Chile, with their rights restored to them. There have been a number of releases over the last year, but almost always on the condition that the person leaves Chile. We do not support this policy of forcible exile of people from their country. In practice however it is obvious that the Junta has no serious intention of voluntarily restoring human rights in the foreseeable future and we must work to save as many as possible of those suffering from the repression. What we insist on is that no prisoner should be exiled before receiving some sort of trial, and any group working for a prisoner should press for his basic legal rights to be respected.

How can your branch help a prisoner?

The main work covers three areas. First you should try and make contact with the prisoner or his family and keep in touch with them throughout. If this is all you can achieve it is a big boost to the prisoner to know that people outside the country are concerned and it causes the military to be more careful in their dealings with him or her. Secondly you should write to the Junta authorities and press for a fair trial or for your prisoner's release. Thirdly you should try to get an offer of work for the prisoner as this can often help.

Is there a lot of money involved?

No. All that's needed is money for letters to Chile. Many people often want to make a donation when they hear how bad conditions are in Chile, but this is entirely up to the individual branch to decide. We send all money to Chile through the Committee for Peace, a church organisation which is working for political prisoners. They are the people on the spot, and in the best position to know where money is most needed. If your prisoner did eventually come to Britain, his or her travel would be paid by the United Nations, and you would not be expected to support him or her on arrival here.

Can you get help with the work?

For many people, writing letters to government officials, and writing in Spanish present problems. Many letters do have to be in Spanish, especially to Chilean officials and the prisoner himself. You can get help from the local branch of the Chile Committee for Human Rights or the Chile Solidarity Campaign, and we can supply addresses.

How long does it take to get a prisoner out?

You should count on this being a slow process. For example it takes at least three months to get a visa to Britain from the date of application in Chile, so that this is a basic limitation, quite apart from the delays and obstacles the Junta may impose.

What can be done within the union?

It is very important to press for the idea of adoption of prisoners to be taken up as union policy. This has just been achieved by NALGO, who specified in their resolution that the issue should be advertised through their journal. This is a very important point and other people should bear it in mind when submitting resolutions to their own unions. There are now articles and reports in every issue on Chilean prisoners, and this helps enormously to spread the word.

How can you join the campaign?

Get in touch with the Chile Committee for Human Rights and we will send details of a prisoner and guidelines for action. We try to match up a union with a prisoner of similar occupation, but this is not always possible.

Unions participating:

<u>APEX</u>	<u>NALGO (cont)</u>	<u>SOGAT</u>
London South East Industrial	Tower Hamlets	Liverpool
	Southwark	
<u>ASTMS</u>	Camden	<u>Staveley Machine Tools</u>
Bristol University		
Southampton	<u>NUJ</u>	<u>T&amp;GWU</u>
Swansea No 2	Oxford	Fowley Power Station
Preston	Northampton	Manor House Hospital
Charing Cross	Edinburgh	
Birmingham Central	London West	<u>Trades Councils</u>
	Southampton	Edinburgh
<u>ATTI</u>		Halifax
Cambridge	<u>NUM</u>	Barnet
Ewell	Scottish Area	Enfield
		Stockport
<u>AUEW-TASS</u>	<u>NUT</u>	Exeter
Hull	Westminster	Eastbourne
Liverpool	Newcastle	Cambridge
	Liverpool	Southwark
<u>CPSA</u>	Edinburgh	Liverpool
Edinburgh Area Committee		Greenwich
	<u>NUPE</u>	
<u>NALGO</u>	Oxford	<u>UCATT</u>
Essex	Edinburgh Hospitals	Glasgow
Swansea	Southampton	