

Amnesty International sponsors prisoner of conscience week

by Brenda Nichols

Amnesty International is organizing a world-wide prisoner of conscience week, running from October 12 to 19 this year, on behalf of victims of different methods of political repression. The theme of the week is "Different faces of Imprisonment" and is concentrating on four types of imprisonment: abduction, prosecution on false criminal charges, house arrest, and short-term arrest.

Amnesty International is a non-governmental, non-political organization which has been fighting political repression since 1963. If a country is suspected of violating human rights, action can be initiated by contacting Amnesty International's headquarters in London, England and an in depth investigation will be launched. If results support the conviction London will contact one of its members and this branch will undertake the assignment of trying to free the political prisoners. Amnesty International has more than a quarter of a million voluntary members and

supporters in 134 countries, and each branch adopts three political prisoners. Peggy Matthews, who is active in Amnesty International, said that "no member of Amnesty ever works on behalf of political prisoners inside their own country due to personal danger and imprisonment."

Thousands of real or suspected critics of their government are reported missing from their homes and many are later found murdered. In Argentina 15000 people have "disappeared" since 1975, and there have been reports of an intricate network of secret detention camps where torture and death are popular. Matthews said that "recently in Chile a student was arrested by police and later found dying in the street." He had obviously been tortured because of his beliefs.

In Guatemala an estimated 25,000 people have been missing since 1966 and thousands more in other countries around the world.

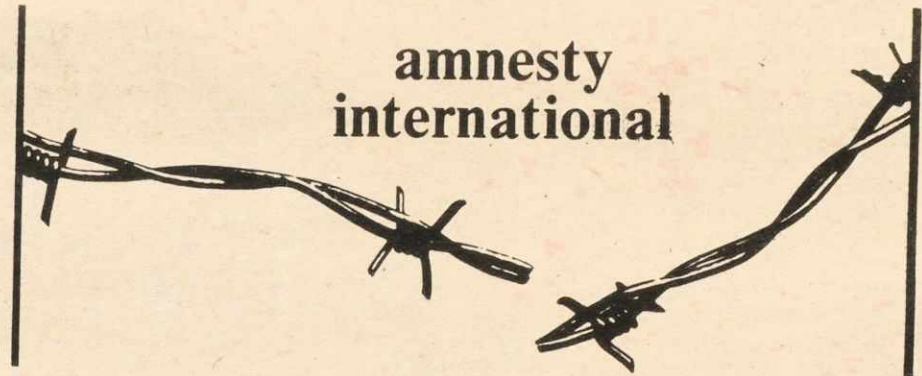
Banning (preventing people from collecting in groups), house arrest (confinement to one's home) and internal exile

are other frequent forms of imprisonment. In South Africa blacks live under strict curfews on the hours they may leave their houses, who they may visit, and many blacks are even isolated from their families. Since 1950 administrative laws have sent more than 1400 people to remote areas where they can barely survive.

called CAT (Campaign Against Torture) was recently established to minimize this type of increasing repression.

Another technique that the USSR and Romania use to enforce governmental views is to arrest citizens on false criminal charges. A Romanian economist applied to emigrate and join his family abroad but

Monday on CHFX radio, and a display taking place on Friday afternoon on the main floor in Scotia Square. Archbishop Hayes will be present at Scotia Square to light candles which are symbolic of the candles behind the barbed wire fence on Amnesty International's crest. Hayes will also be reading parts from the



In Colombia, activists for Indian and trade union rights are constantly being arrested for short-term detention and are often tortured before being released. Pakistan and Poland are among many other countries who use imprisonment and torture to repress their citizens. An organization

was imprisoned on charges of "homosexual acts". Prisoners of conscience in Romania and the Soviet Union are frequently convicted on charges of "hooliganism", and "parasitism". In Mexico, people who are active in student and trade unions, or are involved in land disputes, have been arrested on trumpeted up charges that appear to be false.

Candle lighting at Scotia Square

Amnesty International has been organizing annual prisoner of conscience weeks since 1968. Plans for 1980 include a program about Amnesty which will be playing on Monday, October 13, on ATV, a taped program also playing

United Nations declaration, and leaflets about Amnesty will be distributed.

Amnesty International was recognized for its work in 1977 by winning the Noble Peace Prize and in 1978 by the United Nations Human Rights Prize. This "Transcontinental" organization is not supported by any governments or corporations. Its funds are raised by individual donations, flea markets, subscriptions and other activities such as selling Christmas cards that are inscribed in three languages. Amnesty International is a non-profit organization and the money that is raised is put to research and to finance missions undertaken by doctors and lawyers to visit heads of states and prison camps.

COMMUNITY PAGE

Women excluded from workplace

by Gordon Delaney

Unfair safety regulations for women workers are a gross invasion of privacy and sometimes exclude women from the workplace, said Dr. Jeanne Stellman, executive director of the Women's Occupational Health Resource Centre at Columbia University.

In her opening remarks, which kicked off the start of a 12-hour conference on women and occupational health, Stellman said society is dominated by a "perpetual pregnancy myth" which says that "any woman who is capable of becoming pregnant must be considered so until proven otherwise."

And it is this myth which explains why women are still occupationally segregated from men, said Stellman.

The biochemical differences between a man and a woman are irrelevant to occupational health, she said, "but there is one time when there is a difference between a man and a woman, a time

when the woman is extremely vulnerable to occupational risks—during pregnancy."

The rest of the time men and women face the same on-the-job risks. However, because society has a "fetus fetish" and because it tends to view women as merely reproductive organisms, women have been systematically excluded from the industrial workplace or else subjected to discriminatory practices, said Stellman.

Women must be sterilized at Gm

General Motors in Oshawa has recently told women lead workers that they had to be sterilized if they wanted to work there. This has resulted from the fact that the fetus of a pregnant woman is extremely vulnerable to lead exposure, and a deformed fetus can result in stiff legal action against the employer, Stellman said.

Standard Oil has similar regulations which require that any woman who "misses her period must immediately

report to the foreman," at which time she is given an indefinite leave of absence.

This type of practice results in a "gross invasion of privacy as soon as you enter the workplace," said Stellman.

"Sometimes industry makes safety regulations which mandate the exclusion of women under the assumption that they are protecting reproductive health," she said.

However, if industry is going to protect reproductive health, men must be included in the safety regulation as well, for recent tests have revealed that the male sperm is extremely sensitive to lead and other toxic chemical exposure, said Stellman.

"And everybody knows that reproduction involves two people," she added.

The exposure to toxic chemicals in the workplace has many other serious effects which must be considered also, she said. For example, it has been discovered that the families of male lead

workers also have a high content of lead in their blood.

Subjecting individual workers to severe safety regulations is only a band-aid approach. The real solution is in cleaning up the workplace, Stellman said.

"There are many hazards to genetic well-being in our society. Instead of screening the workers we should be cleaning up the workplace," she said.

"I hope we are not developing into a society of the neutered worker," Stellman added.

She also said there have been very few studies concerning women and occupational health.

The reason for this is that we have a conception in our society that women do not work. Not only men consider women as non-workers, but women themselves do, she said.

Stellman added however, that "women in every country in the world, regardless of political persuasion, work at

least 80 hours a week . . . but get paid on the average one-half of what men do."

"A society which oppresses women and doesn't allow them to develop to their fullest potential definitely has something wrong with it," said Stellman.

At the close of her speech conference participants separated into workshops under the headings of industrial, clerical, hospital, and professional workers.

The workshops were designed to identify the occupational health hazards and problems related to each particular field.

After a buffet lunch, participants watched a 2-hour film entitled: "Working for your Life: Women and Occupational Health."

Later in the day a panel was formed with representatives from the law, labour unions, and the community to discuss possible solutions to the problems which face the 133,000 working women in Nova Scotia.