

Voice for voiceless

by Jacques Goulet

Dr. Jacques Goulet teaches in the Religious Studies Department, at Mount Saint Vincent University.

The poster said: "If you don't like the cops, next time you are in trouble, call a hippy." I laughed. This was a few years ago - but today it no longer seems funny. Serious violations of human rights are taking place all over the world. In many places, security forces and para-military groups are being used as instruments for a policy of political imprisonment and murder. Thousands of persecuted Indonesians, Latin Americans, Soviet Jews, Ugandans have no one to call when they are in trouble. Amnesty International is often the only help available.

Amnesty International, a London-based private agency with 168,000 members in 107 countries, won the 1977 Nobel Peace Prize for its long struggle in the cause of "prisoners of conscience" and against the spreading use of torture. A.I. was founded in London, England, in 1961, by Peter Benenson, a British lawyer and devout Catholic, and a group of lawyers who were appalled at the great number of prisoners of conscience detained (often without charge and under deplorable conditions) in many countries of the world. They were disturbed by the way governments could imprison people for their political beliefs with no questions asked. Amnesty International was to ask those questions.

Amnesty International tries very hard to be even-handed in its adoption of "prisoners of conscience". Nearly 2000 volunteer groups work on behalf of specific men and women: those who have neither used or advocated violence, and are held solely for their beliefs, colour, ethnic origin, etc. In order to maintain political impartiality, each group works for three prisoners, one from a communist state, one from a 'western' nation and one from a developing country.

It is not always easy to make these distinctions neatly, but AI tries to strike a balance. It will be simultaneously concerned with a Russian dissident in a psychiatric hospital, a Chilean in one of General Pinochet's prisons and a black American civil rights activist. The proof of this method's success is that dictatorial governments, of whatever political color, do not like AI. A bulky file of contradictory accusations leveled at AI is kept in the office. AI personnel are regularly being told to go back to their "masters in Moscow" and "masters in Washington"!

Amnesty International is

not just another protest group: it is a body of lawyers working through small, well-informed groups. They are trained to sift evidence carefully, and do so despite the extreme difficulty of gathering information which governments systematically try to conceal. Their reports are models of horrifying objectivity.

For instance, the Canadian section of AI published a list of **Trade Unionists in Prison** as at March 15, 1977. This list, compiled from AI International records, contains the names, addresses, family and social records of 283 trade unionists who are imprisoned, or who have disappeared in 21 countries throughout the world. They are detained because of their membership of trade unions or political activities associated with trade unionism. Many of them are held without charge or trial. Some have been subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment in violation of article 5 of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The list is far from comprehensive.

Amnesty International's hope is that publication of the facts of torture and unjust imprisonment will lead to change. Change depends not on the remote possibility of good will and sudden conversion, but on the pressure of international public opinion. AI members send streams of letters and postcards to the governments concerned. The premise is that the government may be embarrassed enough to make concessions, if not to mend its ways.

According to statistics compiled in the International Secretariate, August 1975, virtually one out of every two detainees highlighted in the past 10 years through AI's **Prison-**



Photo by / E. Wood

Participating in Crossroads means meeting, living, and working with people in developing nations. The streets of the Kenyan island of Lamu illustrate part of one Crossroader's daily experience.

ers of the Month Campaign has been freed, granted a reduction in sentence or transferred to better detention facilities.

To regimes intent on retaining power, the intelligent and questioning members of university faculties and student bodies are precisely those elements in society most likely to attack them in words and actions. It is therefore not surprising that those people figure prominently among the victims of arbitrary imprisonment and torture. It is clear

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Cross culture

by Eric Wood

The Halifax local committee of Canadian Crossroads International is now recruiting volunteers for short term work in Africa, Asia and the Caribbean.

Canadian Crossroads International is a private association of people seeking to promote Cross-cultural awareness and international understanding by offering people in Canada the opportunity to live and work in a country of the third world. Crossroads volunteers are placed individually for four months at on-going development projects in the third world.

For over twenty years, Crossroaders and their local counterparts have used their experience and initiative to help rebuild flooded villages, dig wells, build schools and medical clinics; they have organized camps for underprivileged children in developing countries and have taught physical education, youth leadership, agriculture and journalism.

Participants are selected on the basis of their personal motivations, interest, adaptability and emotional maturity. No particular skills or educational level are necessary. Selection is now underway for the 1979 programs beginning in May and September.

If you would like further information contact Eric Wood at 423-7502, before October 20, 1978.

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Winner of the 1978 Massey medal for distinguished achievement in geographic education, Dr. Pleva is Professor Emeritus of Geography, University of Western Ontario. The geography of the Great Lakes region and the conservation movement have been abiding interests. One of our best teachers, he is a delightful, entertaining and thought-provoking speaker. Please note that tickets are not required for this event, but priority will be given to seating Society members and others who obtained tickets offered to them by mail. All interested members of the public are welcome to attend.