

USLA

REPORT ON NATIONAL USLA ACTIVISTS CONFERENCE

The second conference of USLA activists, held in New York City December 7 and 8, reflected USLA's continued growth and prepared the committee to move forward in the coming months.

This was the largest gathering of USLA activists and supporters ever held, with about one third of the 90 people present coming from other cities. Ten chapters were represented, including Atlanta, Boston, Chicago, Cleveland, Detroit, Minneapolis, New York, Pittsburgh, Philadelphia, and Washington, D.C.

Discussion at the gathering took place under the following four reports: "What is USLA -- Its History, Aims and Defense Strategy," by Jim Little; "The Current State of Repression in Latin America," by Mirta Vidal; "Organizing USLA's Campaigns," by Debbie Woodroffe; and a "Proposal for the Election of a Steering Committee," by Dolores Schaefer. All four reports were unanimously approved.

It was clear from the discussion and contributions from chapter activists that there are many new opportunities to take the committee forward to meet the challenges posed by present conditions throughout Latin America.

ARGENTINA CAMPAIGN

In light of the fact that attacks on left-wing activists and government opponents in Argentina continue to escalate, the activists conference approved the initiation of an Argentine defense campaign. It was announced that, as a first step in this campaign, over 500 signatures from civil libertarians, trade unionists and prominent individuals had been gathered on a telegram to President Peron, protesting the state of siege and denouncing the right-wing violence. Among the signers were singer Judy Collins, civil-liberties lawyer Leonard Boudin, and cartoonist Jules Feiffer.

USLA staff member Mirta Vidal reported completing a ten-day tour of the West Coast to mobilize support for Argentine victims of right-wing persecution. The tour enabled USLA to address a large conference on Argentina and a half-hour television program in Los Angeles, and protest meetings at UCLA and San Francisco State, as well as have a presence at the national convention of the Latin American Studies Association.

The next issue of the USLA Reporter will have major coverage of new developments in Argentina and will feature an exclusive interview with Argentine Senator Hector Sandler, himself a victim of rightist threats, and on-the-spot reporting by our Buenos Aires correspondent.

There are now several individuals in Argentina whose defense USLA should undertake. One is Olga Talamante, a Chicana activist from California, who is imprisoned and has reportedly been tortured. USLA will want to join efforts already initiated in California to obtain her release. Another important case is that of Alberto Jose Munarriz, a 28-year-old student whose recent disappearance has generated a campaign of protest in Argentina to discover his whereabouts. Details and information on what to do about Olga Talamante and Alberto Jose Munarriz will be featured in the next Reporter.

CORAL TOUR

The projected tour of Juan Carlos Coral, approved by the activists conference and scheduled for March and April, affords us a unique opportunity to offer first hand information concerning the situation in Argentina by one of that country's leading political figures.

The national office has begun to prepare the materials the chapters will need to organize the tour in their areas. Enclosed is a brochure with information concerning Coral that chapters can use in obtaining honoraria and introducing the speaker to individuals and organizations we will want to approach about collaborating in various aspects of the tour -- from fund raising, to sponsorship, to press coverage. A tentative tour schedule and tour quotas for each chapter is also enclosed. Chapters should contact the national office about any suggested changes in these as soon as possible.

Given Coral's credentials, endorsement and material support for events featuring Coral in each city should be sought from a broad range of organizations and individuals, including trade unionists, church and civil liberties constituencies, student governments, Latin American studies departments, and Chicano and Latino groups. The dates of the tour have been deliberately chosen to allow ample time for preparation. Chapters are strongly encouraged to begin working on the tour immediately to maximize the amount of money that can be raised, line up media engagements, and ensure that the tour as a whole is thoroughly professional. Further information and suggestions for organizing the Coral tour will be sent to chapters in future mailings.

CHILE DEFENSE

The conference agreed that Chile remains a central focus of activity for USLA. The CIA revelations have added new impetus to that campaign, as a number of successful events held this fall demonstrated. Public meetings featuring authorities on the subject of the CIA and Chile like Laurence Birns, Richard Fagen and Victor Marchetti in New York, Philadelphia, Washington, D.C., and Berkeley, for example, each drew between 100 and 250 people.

WOMEN PRISONERS' DEFENSE

Another important aspect of our Chile campaign is defense of women political prisoners, which has proven to have a good deal of potential to mobilize new forces around the Chile issue. These activities have drawn the active participation of groups like the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, the National Organization for Women, and the Women's Political Caucus.

In New York, USLA organized a delegation of prominent feminists and civil libertarians to confront the Chilean Mission to the United Nations about the condition of women prisoners. The delegation included Ms. magazine editor Gloria Steinem, author Kate Millet, Village Voice columnist Vivian Gornick, WILPF board member Evelyn Mauss, Rose Styron, writer and board member of Amnesty International, Phyllis Chesler, psychologist and author of Women and Madness, Helen Rodriguez, of the Ad Hoc Committee for Chilean Health Workers, and Arlie Scott, chairwoman of NOW's International Committee. Although the Mission canceled the appointment with the delegation, fearing the unfavorable publicity it would generate for them, a successful press conference was held that same day that received coverage in three television stations.

Some weeks earlier, an USLA sponsored meeting around this theme at New York University drew over 250 people. The interest shown by feminists in this issue indicates that we should attempt to organize further activities aimed at drawing them into this campaign.

One possibility along these lines is for USLA to help organize public meetings featuring Maria Isabel Barrena, who will be touring the U.S. in late January and part of February. Barrena is one of three leading feminists in Portugal victimized under the former military regime for their controversial book, New Portuguese Letters. Through her tour, Barrena hopes to mobilize support in defense of Lidia Falcon and Genoveva Sastre Forest, two Spanish political prisoners (see the current issue of the Reporter), and a Brazilian woman now imprisoned and being tortured in Brazil.

Barrena's visit could provide an ideal focus for large public meetings on the subject of women political prisoners around the world, at which USLA could highlight the plight of Chilean women prisoners. Chapters that would like to help organize an event for Barrena should discuss further details with the national office. (NOTE: The January issue of Ms. features an article entitled "The Case of the Three Marias" and an article by Rose Styron on the subject of women political prisoners around the world, which lists USLA as one of the organizations defending women political prisoners.)

BRAZIL AND URUGUAY

The activists conference discussed the current state of repression in Brazil and Uruguay, which remains critical, and agreed that these two countries should be given special attention by USLA. Information concerning Brazil and Uruguay will be given priority in the USLA Reporter and other publications of USLA. Local chapters should attempt to publicize this information and take advantage of any opportunity to mobilize the considerable interest that already exists in defending the victims of repression in these two countries.

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In addition to discussing USLA's priorities and projecting activities for the next few months, the activists conference discussed USLA's character and aims as a non-partisan, civil liberties defense committee. The discussion centered mainly on USLA's relationship to other organizations and, specifically, to those that make the slogan of "support to the Chilean resistance" a condition for joining coalition activities. The conference reaffirmed USLA's character as a defense committee, rejected taking a position on political questions like the Chilean resistance, and agreed that coalitions should be made whenever possible on the basis of agreement around specific actions to defend the victims of political persecution.

The conference also elected a national steering committee to handle organizational matters in between activists conferences, in consultation with the USLA Board. The following nine people were elected to the steering committee: Jim Little, Dolores Schaefer, and Mirta Vidal, USLA national office; Richard Garza, USLA Board; Marie Jensen, Treasurer; Debbie Woodroffe, New York chapter; Dave Jerome, Philadelphia chapter; and Eloise Linger, Washington, D.C. chapter.

The steering committee met December 8 and decided that, given USLA's current financial situation, the staff would be temporarily reduced to one person and will be expanded as the finances allow. Minutes of the steering committee meeting are enclosed.