



Moris Farbi (left) in Israel with **Sami Michael** one of Israel's foremost writers and political commentators. He is also President of Israel's Human Rights Association.

Suburb writer honoured

'For services to literature' reads the citation with the MBE recently awarded to Moris Farbi (of North Square). It might equally truly have read 'For services to humanity'.

All Moris's novels highlight the plight of persecuted peoples. Two peoples in the case of *The Last Days* (about the Arab/Israeli conflict); while *Journey Through the Wilderness* is about the Amerindians in the Andes, descendants of the Incas, and *Children of the Rainbow* about the gypsies of Eastern Europe (these two are coming out in paperback later this year).

But there is much more than the novels to Moris's lifelong opposition to the violation of human rights. Back in the 1960s, when so many Soviet writers were being sent to gulags, labour camps or so-called 'mental homes' (to be brainwashed with drugs), the English PNE (authors' association) had started to campaign for their release; to such effect that similar campaigns sprang up highlighting the large numbers of countries in which attempts to stifle the publication of dissident views were rife. Then the International PEN (to which belong about 140 individual PEN groups worldwide) appointed a director to run a special branch dealing specifically with the problem and to help 50 'Writers in Prison' groups of which three are in Britain, each of which adopts at least one imprisoned writer. There could be more such

groups but for lack of funds. They collaborate with Amnesty and other human rights groups, but are unique in dealing specifically with the plight of authors and journalists. Although many of these are suffering for political views, PEN itself is non-political.

Moris joined the English Writers in Prison group in 1985, became its chairman 1994-1997, chaired the International Writers in Prison Committee 1997-2000 and is now a vice-president of the international organisation. Here are just two examples of what he and his colleagues have achieved. Young Ali Idrissi Khaitouni was given a 13 year prison sentence for writing a poem which the then King of Morocco regarded as insulting to himself. After much campaigning, Moris and his colleagues managed to free him after six years. He was the first person whom Ali greeted (by phone) on his release: the two men were in tears. Ali is now himself a human rights campaigner. Then there was the Iranian Faraj Sarkohi. Hit-men of the Iranian government had recently killed Kurds who had been campaigning for their cause in Germany (where many Kurds live in exile) when Faraj, editor of an Iranian periodical keen on human rights, set off to visit relatives there - but disappeared en route. Iranian officials brought him back to face trial on two trumped-up charges each of which carried

the death penalty: spying and adultery. For a year, Moris took part in weekly demonstrations outside the Iranian Embassy in London as a result of which Faraj was released and let out of Iran. Now living in Germany, he is writing a novel based on his experiences in an Iranian prison. (As in France, Sweden and Norway, there are in Germany designated 'cities of refuge' for people like him; and there is a move afoot to give Swansea a similar role).

But of some 200 cases on the database of International PEN, about 80 are in Turkey - Moris's place of birth. Not all these writers are yet in prison; because of international odium at such persecution, some countries resort to manipulating trials that are protracted for years with repeated adjournments, during which victims are harassed and unable to get employment. Others, such as China, resort to exiling dissidents.

Being himself a Jew, Moris is keenly interested in the Israeli-Palestinian Coalition for Peace and is currently working with the British supporters of this, while working on a new book *Young Turk* - an impressionistic novel based on his experiences of Turkey in the 1940s and 1950s. On 14 May, Moris will be at the Royal Festival Hall to give some readings from his own books and answer questions (7.30 one of the 'Voice Box' series there).

ELIZABETH COCKBURN

All PEN campaigners are volunteers and expenses have to be met from donations (which can be sent to International PEN, 9-10 Charterhouse Buildings, Goswell Road, EC1).



Big Fun Walk participants enjoying their well-earned refreshments at Westminster having completed the 7½ mile walk in aid of the North London Hospice

North London Hospice Big Fun Walk

It was sunshine and spring flowers all the way for the 1,300 sponsored walkers for the Big Fun Walk in aid of the North London Hospice.

This annual event attracts many of the loved ones of patients who have been nursed at the Hospice. Adults, children and dogs enjoyed a super day

out walking through the London Parks whilst raising funds for this centre of excellence in the care of terminally ill patients in North Finchley.

The North West Support Group, who organise this event,

pay tribute to the wonderful walkers, many of whom had helped last year to raise in excess of £100,000 and they are hoping for yet another bumper year when the sponsorship money is received.



"No clowning around until I'm sure of the walk."



Chairman Dr Chris Donovan (centre) and the Mayor of Barnet, Cllr Anita Cambell (right) with other walkers.

...and a big fun Barn Dance

At another very popular event run by the North West Support Group in aid of the hospice the organising committee line up with the band during an interval in a hectic evening of barn dancing that was enjoyed by all.



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Edward Coke - 1628

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