42-4 42-4

Prisoners in Revolution

Response to the Weather Underground

This paper is written in response to, and as a further discussion of the ideas brought forth in Prairie Fire. It was written by a group of black and white revolutionary prisoners in New Hampshire State Prison. We wrote this not as a critique of Prairie Fire, rather because we felt that it did not go into much depth in the area of prisons, prisoners, and ex-prisoners.

Although all of us came from somewhat different levels of ex-perience in the struggle, we found that the ideas and analysis presented in Prairie were important and to be taken seriously. We share amongst ourselves, as well as with many others in this country, the understanding of the import-ance of a mass anti-imperialist movement, a vanguard party, and a militant action arm. We do not feel that prisoners as a group are a vanguard force, but we do believe that the experiences of captivity, the day to day high level of repression that we live under does give us a certain understanding and spirit that needs to be discussed ans shared with our comrades in all areas of struggle. We also feel that it is crucial - for prisoners first, but ultimately for all people moving for freedom that the people outside gain a better understanding of conditions in captivity and the need for stronger and more real solidarity between prisoners and people outside. We offer this message as a starting point, something to be heard, discussed, critized and commented on. While we invite responses from all people, we hope that more of our captive sisters and brothers read this as well as Prairie Fire and respond to them. Amerikan Kamps being what they are, we suggest that any communications regarding these words be sent to the New England Prisoners Association, Franconia, N.H. 03580, so that we are sure we will receive them.

Functions of Prisons in Amerika

A society, such as the U.S., which is based on private accumulation of wealth, on private ownership of productive forces, and which elevated the exploitation of the many by the few to a hallowed level, such a society will have many penal institutions. First to serve as a warning to all those re-gular people who might not perform their jobs in the way the rulers prescribe, or who might balk at the lives they are forced to lead. Secondly, as a source of free or in actuality, slave labor. Also as brainwashing institutions which attempt to regroove those people who have not conformed to the rules of a

of a dog eat dog system - or for those who, like the majority of prisoners, have attempted to enrich themselves at the expense of others, but who were not part of the monied class, who steal legally. Finally, prisons are used as prison warehouses for the workers which amerika does not need - there fore, has to repress.

Revolution in this country, revolution in the capitalist system, revolution of a system that l es, that oppresses through manipulation of mind control, through cultural control, through education control and living control. Prisoners need revolution and many understand this in an intense way. We are experiencing it in a community level, a political level, psychological level, working person level, family level and barbarian level.

We understand the meaning of inflation, racism, unemployment, police state, poverty and real crimes. Why do we know - because we are the people that are put into test lab type of institutions where we are the quinea pigs for the control programs the state would like to use on the people in the streets We are picked of our minds, feelings, and pride. Yet we learn to survive in a steel ghetto. We learn of gestapo like repression that echos the cries of concentration kamps of Nazi, Germany.

As much as there has been progress in society, there has been that much more porgress in methods of uses of the human entity for the benefit of political and cultural control. Examples of developed methods in prisons can show a pattern of how close we are coming to a total police state. These methods are widely referred as behavior modification. Just as physical lobotomies, still exhit, ssychological lobotomies, in chich a person is deceived through trickery and lies, are practiced.

These methods can be traced back to the idea of dangling a carrot on a stick, where the horse is blindly lead. Today the carrot is replaced with such things as good time, meaning a possibility of an earlier release, or furloughs, etc. If these steps don't work, another level of disorientation is used where your free form thoughts are shattered and replaced with robot like ideas. This works like the rat in a maze that is taught through shocks of pain. In prisons, captives are shocked with beastial acts of confinement in isolation units, shocked with jolts of constant harassment of loss of so-called privileges (in reality, loss of peoples' essential needs), shocked with numerous set-ups where one is caught up in vicious circles of receiving more time, till the captive realizes that his/her whole life has been ripped

off. The ultimate level of behavior modification is physical tresspass of ones human rights, either by lobotomy, electro shock, or filling a person with drugs that leaves the prisoner literally helpless in mind and body.

Racism is also used as a method of control, playing one victim against another, but because of changing attitudes among the people, racism is becoming harder to see for it hides in newer disguises of tokenism. No more is it just "nigger this nigger that", but also the Mr. Nice Guy approach where you then become a victim of some set-up by the prison staff. Of course racism in its brutal naked from is used as well.

Although prison keepers don't officially recognize political prisoners, they do try to use differences between political and regular captives. The real differneces between political and regular is sometimes only a thin edge blade because of the shared oppressive conditions we face, yet within the walls it goes deeper than its' thin edge. Regualr prisoners are primarily those that have acted out against the people or state for capital gains or for individualistic, even fascistic ideals, while political prisoners are the realized victims of acts against the state oppressor. There is also another type of political prisoner - and more of these each day - namely the person who has been incarcerated for ordinary criminal acts, but who has become policitally conscious and active while in captivity. Basically any differences between political or criminal prisoners are not crucial, for only with unity and understanding of each other can victories be won.

Outlaw to Rebel * Rebel to Revolutionary

In the past several decades the type of people sent to prison has changed. Previously the average person sent to prison had little education, few had high school diplomas - not that a piece of paper is important - but the average prisoner today does have moreeducation and through education comes clearer understa ding, better methods of organization and hence the more intense and political prison struggle of the recent years.

Besides education, other factors have made prisoners more aware and active. Important among these has been the national struggles that have been going on for the past twenty years, especially the struggles of Black people. The recent wave of prison struggles can be traced to Muslim struggles in and out of prisons in the early 60's, followed by other black efforts and in the past 10 years we have seen many captives not only move for special group rights, but unite together to fight for common human rights.

A person commits a crime and is sent to prison. They have acted out against how society is formed because evidently it wasn't formed with him or her in mind. The act is done to satisfy needs or to play out anxieties. Once inside, the person might rebel against the authority and conditions of prison life. In rebelling more repression is wrought upon that person. This is the period when a qualitiative step can be taken - is taken by many - to advance the persons' understanding, to encompass the common struggle that needs to be waged by all prisoners of amerika, whether maximum security (prison) or minimum security (streets).

Many people leave prisons today to continue the struggle either by organizing around penal issues or by bringing to light just where the whole system is at. Not that there weren't people like this in years past, but there are many more people being sent to prisons now and on the whole they are less into gangsterism, younger and/or more aware.

Prison Movement * In-Out

One might ask, what exactly is the prison movement? Apart of it is that prisoners as a whole are demanding their civil rights, to be treated fairly and justly as people under the provisions of the Constitution. Another part is that although the movement has reformist tendencies, a large part of it questions and refutes the basic right of the system to lock up people for what the capitalist system considers crime - in essence, it is largely an anti-imperialist movement. The great upsurge in the prison movement is due to the fact that people are becoming more oppressive and are designed to trap the potential revolutionist.

Outside the prison many organizations have been formed for the protection of prisoners' rights. Some of these are broad based, openly revolutionary groups who have foreseen the need to have prisoners and ex-prisoners in their organizations. Others are reform groups, interested in civil/legal rights and in a sense in propping up the current government in order to show that it "still works". Both are important to the struggle because prisons are so bad in this country that we can use all the help we can get. These groups operate by putting out prison-oriented papers, forming legal lobbies, setting up defense committees, holding rallies and demonstrations, fighting court battles, and, an unfortunately too few, taking direct militant actions in response to atrocities committed by the state.

Yet even with all this happening, it is not enough, because the state insists upon using gestapo like measures in dealing with prisoners. Legislatures keep testing the resolve of prisoners and their support groups by imposing repressive rules and when the captives move to oust these new rules, the state sends in their shock troops, demonstrating their contempt for the well being of their charges. Often we hear prison admin strators saying that all prisoners should be lined up against a wall and shot, and of course the world has seen this happen.

Inside the walls prisoners have been forming and are now forming committees, advisory councils, and unions to air our needs and to organize for our rights. These efforts have met with even greater resistance than outside groups have had to deal with when they organize. Administrating staff and guards fear prisoners because they sense that once they get together, really together, they would be powerless to carry out their campaign of selective or all out repression. So if the quards see a group of captives getting down with books by Marx or other revolutionary literature, if they see people talking together about conditions or how to combat them, they report it and once again the iron heel comes down.

In every prison there are people at least fairly adept at writing legal writs for themselves or others. These people too, often feel the worst of the oppressors might. Legal petitions are an important method of struggle behind the walls, but there are definite limits to this tactic - and it should be seen only as a tactic, not a strategy. Legal petitions are overly dependent on the whims of a judge and just about every court in the country, if not every single one, are not sympathetic to prisoners. Also the laws themselves are geared to <u>not</u> serve the interests of poor people, especially captives, so along with these court efforts, food strikes, work stoppages (usually a very important method since prisons are profit-making insituttions), and even full scale uprisings are necessary.

The state ignores the fact that prisoners are people, not animals to be kept in cages, and because of this the forces of "law and order" became naked oppressors, but this, they also became legitimate targets for insurrection. Even the Declaration of Independence states this, but the U.S. obviously doesn't pay much attention to such details.

In what is probably a unique feature of the amerikan struggle, we believe the prison movement is an intregal part of the revolutionary struggle in general.

First, because prisoners are living in the pit of the beast and the pit is growing daily. The distance between the poorest and most oppressed "free" communities and prisons is usually one step - even an accidental one; and the people who are most constantly in conflict with the state are also the people who comprise the large majority in kamps, i.e. minority, poor, etc. Even the civil rights struggles in prisons are ususlly of a revolutionary nature - as for the participants, many are understanding that while these are necessary survival struggles, the real injustices of prison cannot be eliminated without the abolition of corporate capitalist amerika.

Role of Prisoners & Ex-prisoners in the Revolution

Recently, some ideas have been circulated that prisoners are or will be the vanguard in the struggle. While we reject this, neither do we believe that the traditional positions of Marx on the lumpens and prisoners are correct. The actions and lessons of Attica, Walpole, George Jackson and innumerable others as well as the changing nature of prisoners in general, clearly shows that various revolutionary ideas, groups/individuals, and struggles are occuring behind the walls today. The reasonsfor this are many: increasing national struggle, student/youth rebellions of a few years ago having created changes in young people in general - and young people are the majority in kamps today, the worsening economic situations making it necessary for larger numbers of people to seek extra-legal methods of survival, increasing numbers of people sent to jail for revolutionary acts or on trumped-up charges, and many more reasons. Also, just the fact of living in the belly of the shark, with even the small pleasures that are allowed on the outside being taken away, and with the constant repression that is the reality of prison, makes it likely that captives will begin to ask real questions and learn crucial lessons about the nature of the system they live under - first prisons, then the system which needs these prisons, as well as the lessons of how to fight to survive and eliminate this injustice. Of course the large majority of prisoners know the reality of ghetto-poverty life, but on the streets little time is spent on reflection if the person is busy hustling legally or illegally for a living.

In the context of America in general, the struggles and existence of life in kamps can be termed as closest to conditions of war. People are broken, beaten, killed, forced to work as slaves with no pay or at best pennies a day, like in no other situation in this country today. The state and federal

prison systems make tens of millions of dollars a year from the unpaid labor of captives. The naked injustice and terror of amerika is most obvious - with all the frills removed - behind the walls like nowhere else in this country. This reality while not turning every prisoner into a revolutionary, leaves its mark.

Besides being a source of free labor, prisons on state and federal levels are experimenting with various social control programs. There is a cause and effect reason for this. On the one hand the old methods of naked terror coupled with gangs of inmates running prisons has by and large broken down with the emergence of revolutionary groups and coalition seeking to fight for survival of all captives - the old ways dont work so brain washing, drugs, and various other behavior modification schemes are being used. The other, and perhaps even more dangerous reasons for these programs is that whatever works for prisoners will and to some degree has already been implemented for use outside. Most of these behavior mod games are funded by agencies like LEAA or state equivilents, and the results are reported back and passed on to other agencies like schools, armed forces, etc.

At considerable human cost prisoners have resisted and recently successfully fought many of these schemes - the START program of the federal system, the maxi/hospital kamp in N.Y. State, the tri-state northern New England special offenders prison just to name a few. The lesson learned in these struggles, as well as the ever emerging picture of what amerikan fascism will look like should be studied and understood and put in context by all progressive people. In this area prisoners, out of necessity, are in the vanguard role.

In order to combat these attacks, as well as survive in a high intensity struggle situation, prisoners throughout the land have had to learn and put into practice many principles that, while expressed outside, are sadly not practiced enough. Most important is the conbating of racism, and with this the forging of real unity and solidarity. Unfortunately, there still exists many racist flare-ups, some gang warfare, and a certain tendancy to try lumpen/individualist solutions - the last is probably more true in kamps because of the experience that many prisoners came from on the outside. Still we have seen many cases where a struggle was sucessful or simply made possible because of real unity - Attica, Atmore/Holman, McAllister, Bedford Hills, etc. As for the vindictive and sectarian polemics that are presently, and it seems historically raging in the left, these are just not reproduced in kamps. This does not mean that they are not considered important (some of them at least), or that all, even revolutionary prisoners have one unified line,

but it has been learned through struggle that to spend more time fighting each other only plays into the hands of the enemy. In a sense, we cannot afford the luxury of long word games, the oppressor is too close to our necks. Principled unity-fighting unity, is necessary in all cases of struggle.

Prisoners more and more are understanding that this system (imperial amerika), is built on power/terror. Behind the candybar lies the gun. It was no accident that the SLA had ex-prisoners involved, nor should it be surprising that almost all prisoners responses to their actions were at least critically supporting.

Besides the struggles that captives are engaged in behind the walls, prisoners and especially the recently released sisters and brothers will certainly want to, and become involved in the most militant struggle.

It has been rightly pointed out that a danger lies in the fact that people coming out from the kamps and of course those still inside, might have an unreal picture of conditions outside, and certainly concrete evaluations of concrete situations should be the rule. But there is the other side of this, namely that we have seen the reality of amerika with all the frosting removed and we've understood that only force will bring down the oppressor. This understanding and determination should not be cast aside and it is especially the responsibility of those groups that have experience in militant and armed activity, to share what can be shared in terms of practice and ideas. Self-defense and armed propaganda are the least that is already needed, and in our opinion even stronger actions are called for in many areas of struggle today.

Thus, while prisoners and exprisoners are not the vanguard, our experience leading to captivity and our many battles with the enemy while in prison, place us in a leading position in certain areas. Basically, we are the workers which amerikan capitalism can not use - therefore, has to repress; economic conditions alone will unfortunately increase our ranks and the struggles of prisoners has made us a determined and militant cutting edge of the whole Peoples' Struggle.

Venceremos

Roger Boberg
John Yancey
Jaan Laaman
Richard Williams

2/11/75 N.H. State Prison