

'SPRING IS NEAR' NEWS

A PRISONER NEWSLETTER FOR MISSOURI AND BEYOND
MARCH - APRIL 2014



NO FENCES

BY MARIE MASON

I've been on the wrong side
Of too many fences
Their lamentations creaking sour
Protests of possession.
Dissonant in any ear
And in mine, so much . . .
The coyote's song is sweeter so,
By far
A harmony with air
And he owns nothing but the world itself
So let me be
Where the wind blows free
Through rocky arches, twisting trees
To fill the breathless sky
So wide and full of light
Unsubdivided, indivisible,
This vaulted blue cathedral,
Just here,
Where we disappear alone,
Where we are made whole again
Together
There are no fences here
At all.

AN EXERCISE FOR COMBATING THE ISOLATION OF PRISON LIFE

STANDING FORWARD BEND

With each exhalation, allow your body to relax deeper into the stretch. With each breath, allow your stress to dissipate and peace to fill your mind.





HELLO

Spring is near and signs of such can be heard in the early mornings when the birds are chirping or seen on branches that have already begun to sprout forth a bud. There are still chilly, grey days that make the days we can feel the sun shine upon our faces all the more invigorating.

Another month has passed. We are still here, and we still hate prisons. Hearing back from some of you has been super exciting -- whether it was to request a zine catalog or say you heard us making noise outside your windows to support the hunger strike. We got goose bumps reading that our joyous hatred multiplied, and while some of you were sent to the hole for ninety days, you felt it worthwhile to defy orders and yell back to us. Those prison walls can't keep us apart.

An execution took place this past month in Missouri, marking the fourth in as many months - a dramatic uptick from recent years. There has been some debate about the validity of the source of the drug used in the executions, and those who oppose the death penalty but promote "life without the possibility of parole" continue to seek such superficial reforms.

But such meager protest fails to get to the root of the problem. Abolishing death by execution just means a greater shift toward death by incarceration (i.e. life imprisonment). Abolishing prisons (without eliminating that State) would simply mean that punishment, surveillance and control are more diffused into every aspect of our lives. We don't want to live in that world, or in this one.

We question the concentrations of power that allow the State to lock people in cages or execute them. Our only hope lies in continuing and deepening the collective struggles against prisons that we've seen and been a part of in recent months, which hold the potential to destabilize these concentrations of power so that something really different might be possible. We want a whole new world altogether.

Thanks to those of you who want that too.



WHY WE DO WHAT WE DO

“What is the prison? The prison is this; it is a structure designed to regulate the body to the maximum.”

- Nanni Ballestrini, *The Unseen*

Within prison, control over the body is paramount. The entire system, from the walls and razor wire to the privileges and classifications, is designed to regulate and manage the prisoner's body. This means that a struggle in which prisoners assert control over their own bodies directly threatens the power upon which the prison is maintained.

While the hunger strike may be a limited form of struggle, in that it does not immediately and directly attack the prison itself, it is a powerful weapon in the toolbox of the anti-prison struggle. Alongside the work stoppage, the refusal to move from one's cell, and the riot (not to mention the mass escape and the prison takeover), the hunger strike is a recurring theme throughout the history of prison rebellions. And it is precisely because the hunger strike is a part of this lineage, as an expression of the prisoners' capacity to collectively organize, that it is feared by prison administrations everywhere.

Inside prisons, we find simultaneously a fertile ground for the spread of rebellious attitudes and the most inhospitable terrain for their expression in collective activity. Secure Housing Units, Control Management Units, Administrative Segregation, “the hole” – all prisons within the prison designed specifically to limit movement and communication between prisoners, preemptively cutting off even the possibility of collective thought and activity. Even the penitentiary itself functions to separate insubordinate prisoners from each other. In the wake of prison rebellions the collectives formed during their course are broken up through transfers and additional punishments. And yet struggles on the inside appear again and again, recently taking on increasingly massive and diffuse forms.

Prison is perhaps one of the last arenas of struggle in which the liberal, recuperative Left holds little to no sway. There is no political party, no official union within the prison through which the rage of prisoners can be channeled and stifled. Which is not to say that there is nothing to critique, especially amongst the ranks of those who would, from the outside, artificially impose their preferred tactics and a moral penchant for non-violence.

In some ways, the ubiquity of repressive violence and gang/racial tensions within prisons makes recuperation unnecessary. Yet, more and more, these measures are incapable of restraining and stifling a simmering discontent among the prison population.

From the isolated fires and riots of the early 2000's to Georgia's statewide work stoppage in December 2010, the 2012 hunger strike which began in California and reverberated through prisons as far away as Ohio and Ontario, to the current wave of strikes moving through prisons in the Midwest, we find ourselves amidst a renewed wave of collective struggle within prisons. Whether or not this rising swell can overcome the heights of the prison walls and spill out into the broader society remains to be seen.

In the solidarity demonstrations which continue to occur throughout the country, we can see an embryonic version of the links between struggles which are a necessary precondition for the development of a truly uncontrollable upheaval. The very fact of a movement on the outside which can quickly respond to and act in solidarity with rebellions on the inside is a factor which previous prisoner revolts may have benefited from. The tactical forms of this solidarity will undoubtedly change as struggles continue to appear in various intensities, yet it is essential that it remains a constant.

By engaging with the struggles of prisoners we not only express solidarity with their revolt, but also, we begin to attack the idea of imprisonment. The fear of prison is in part based on the concept that life (collectivity, conflict with the social order) ends once one passes through the gates of a prison. By acting in concert with prisoners we can begin to create continuity between the anti-state, anti-capitalist struggle and the anti-prison struggle, thus ensuring that when comrades inevitably find themselves behind bars they are not so alone, not so immobilized and defeated.

The task of razing the prison walls is a large one; perhaps too large to even comprehend from this vantage point. And yet we continue to find meaning and joy in the struggle against prisons and the society which creates them. For if we did not engage in this struggle, if we refused to see ourselves in the rebels on both sides of the prison walls, we would not be complete, we would not be true to ourselves. And it is for this reason that, despite all of history's setbacks and failures, we continue to search for openings through which another world might emerge.





WE HEARD FROM YOU

ZINE REVIEW by an Ohio Prisoner

“Liberation or Gangsterism, Freedom or Slavery”
by Russell Maroon Shoatz

Revolutionary greetings. I received your letter and the podcast transcripts, thank you for sending them. I read them and passed them on to another revolutionary minded brother. I’ve read many of the zines you’ve sent as well and found most of them informative and a few to be really eye opening, like “Liberation or Gangsterism.” I’m white and from what people might call a “white trash” family, so the plight of African Americans in “lower class” urban areas as been a mystery to me, but the explanation of the uses of oppression tools like co-optation, separation and glamorization of gangsterism was enlightening in such a way that it became easy to understand, especially in contrast with their counterparts that I experienced in my upbringing in the “white trash” community, such as the teaching of racial superiority, separation of races and the need of keeping “pure” blood.

Let us know if you want a copy of this zine!

FROM AN OHIO PRISONER

An excerpt from a letter

Anyhow, I happen to be a white comrade who embraces the struggle and will keep my fist up no matter what may take place. I have in the past six years been trying to bring full awareness to my fellas and comrades within those walls and open their eyes to how the “admin” use racism to have us at each other. It helps them to control and helps them to locate when certain people do things. But united with solidarity they would be off focus and shook to the core. I indeed do have a reputation and now I am trying to use for the betterment of all of us in common and I even started a cell or what is called a “prison threat group, gang” and it is multi-race.

ON THE INSIDE

Frustrated with the various rules and regulations, an inmate at Missouri Eastern Correctional Center in Pacific, MO, was reported to be on hunger strike for 6 days.
-KSDK, January 28

Fed up prisoners at St. Clair Correctional Facility in Springville, Alabama, somehow managed to upload 60 videos in three days to youtube, documenting the abuse and unsanitary conditions at the prison.
-Alabama Media Group, January 28

Houston County Jail officials in Dothan, Alabama, reported that a group of unknown people broke into the facility through a fence and window in a failed effort to free a group of prisoners.
-WTVY-Dothan, February 6

Three prisoners threatened with deportation are on hunger strike at York County Prison in York, Pennsylvania. Two dozen supporters demonstrated at the Philadelphia, office of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) for the release of the men and they also accused the feds of targeting the undocumented in nearby Norristown, PA.
-CBS Philly, February 11

Football Hall of Famer O.J. Simpson, a prisoner at Lovelock Correctional Center, in Lovelock, Nevada, launches a hunger strike.
-The Daily Mail, February 12


A scuffle between prisoners and guards at the Cameron County Detention Center in Olmito, Texas sends 9 guards to the hospital.
-KFXV-McAllen, February 12

Hunger-striking prisoners at Menard Correctional Center, in Chester Illinois, were met by a second demonstration in support of them beneath their cell windows. Demonstrators banged drums and shouted support, and prisoners shouted back their demands and gratitude. In Chicago at the same time, dozens of hunger-strike supporters rallied outside the state Department of Corrections headquarters.
-The Southern Illinoisian, February 14

Ninety male inmates at the Durango jail, in Phoenix, Arizona, joined their 9 female counterparts at the nearby Estrella jail in launching a hunger strike against vegetarian-only meals of poor quality.
-KSAZ-Phoenix, February 17

Complaining of abusive conditions, bugs in the food, sexual harassment, denied access to the law library, and improper medical treatment, 10 prisoners in the special management unit (SMU) of the Georgia Diagnostic Correctional Prison in Jackson, Georgia, launched a hunger strike.
-San Francisco Bay View, February 19

More than 10 prisoners inside Eloy Detention Center in Eloy, Arizona, went on hunger strike to protest their pending deportations. Friends and families of the prisoners set up a protest encampment outside the Phoenix ICE office, declared a hunger strike themselves, and demanded an end to all deportations. One week later, the police raided and evicted the sleeping encampment, arresting two. The next day, the protesters re-established the encampment.
-Phoenix New Times, February 25



the explosion of stars is not reserved for ticket holders

✦Max Ernst

NEWS DIGEST continued

Nine prisoners held in the H-Unit at the U.S. Penitentiary, Administrative Maximum Facility (ADX) in Florence, Colorado were on hunger strike.

-*The Nation*, February 27

Detained immigrants launch a massive hunger and work strike at Tacoma Detention Center with 1200 participating. Their demands are for improved working conditions and for an end to the deportations every week.

- *The Tacoma Times*, March 12

ON THE OUTSIDE

Outside the headquarters of the Mississippi Department of Corrections in Jackson, about 35 people chanted, held signs, and called the commissioner names while protesting the end to conjugal visits for state inmates.

-*The Clarion-Ledger*, January 17

At a hearing at the State Capitol in Sacramento, California, triggered by last summer's state-wide hunger strike, hundreds crowd the room demanding an end to solitary confinement.

-*The Sacramento Bee*, February 11

Five thousand people protest the construction of a new Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) Detention Center in Santa Maria, California

-*Santa Barbara Independent*, February 13

Dozens protested outside the Hennepin County jail in Minneapolis, Minnesota, calling on the Sheriff to stop cooperating with Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) in deporting immigrants via that jail.

-*KSTP-Minneapolis*, February 14

A RESPONSE

Some people have written responding to our statement that we do not wish to correspond with rapists if they do not think that rape is a problem, and further, that we dream of a world in which rapists, like prisons, do not exist. We'd like to explain further what we mean by that.

In some ways, singling out people convicted of rape by the State is unfair. Because fuck the State—cops and judges and prosecutors spend their days locking people in cages, beating people in the streets, and crushing our struggles toward freedom. Their decisions about who is “guilty” or “not guilty” mean nothing to us. When trying to determine what actions harm us or our friends and who should be held accountable, we look to ourselves and to each other, not to the laws of the State.

We know full well that we interact with a rapist every time we walk down the street, because in this culture, rape is the norm. In saying we don't want to receive letters from unrepentant rapists in prison, we do not mean to put a spotlight on those rapists who got caught and prosecuted by the courts. All rapists who do not take their actions seriously and seek to do something really different deserve our hatred and anger, as does the culture of sexual violence that is so normalized amongst us both inside and outside of prison.

We say that rape is the norm because of the reality that we live in a rape culture. Rape isn't just a rare act committed by the worst of the worst; the mentality of rape is woven into the very fabric of daily life. In a society built on co-

PLOW POSE TO HELP YOU SLEEP

Lie down on your back, lifting your legs over your head and then to the ground behind you, with your hands either on your back for support or on the floor. Staying in the plow pose for one to five minutes will help you to fall asleep easier. It is one pose that helps you combat stress and sleep deprivation.



A RESPONSE continued

ercion and domination (of kings over peasants, bosses over workers, colonizers over indigenous peoples, men over women, whites over Blacks and slave-master over slave) whether or not someone *wants* something is not really a core consideration in society. It is no surprise, in this context, that having sex with people in ways they don't want would be the norm.

We oppose all instances of domination, exploitation and coercion. We wanna live in a world where each individual is responsible for what happens to their own body and gets to make their own choices for themselves. The same reasons we hate cops and prisons make us hate rape and rapists. The cop beats us in the street, locks us in cages, and steals us away from our friends and family. They are a force of domination and oppressive power that must be destroyed.

While rapists (unlike cops) don't usually have the power of the State behind them (they don't have an army of other rapists to help them in a moment's notice, nor courts and prisons to justify and then carry out their torturous plans), they no less dominate and destroy the lives of those they rape. Some survivors of rape live not in a physical cage like those in prison, but in a cage of sexual trauma and fear. Rape has the potential to shatter one's sense of personal safety, confidence and capacity to think clearly about one's sexual life. Rapists use force over those who are weaker in order to gain sexual gratification from that person's body against their will.

And when we say rape, we don't just mean strangers attacking unsuspecting women in an alley, or other such overt situations. We mean also date rape—where, say, someone refuses to stop when the person they are having sex with says “no,” changes their mind, or wants to kiss, but doesn't want to fuck. We mean a mentality of taking advantage of others in order to gain sexual gratification from their body. Slipping someone drugs, ignoring someone's hesitations, trying to convince someone to have sex who doesn't want to, or to have a kind of sex they don't want to, being pushy or demanding of sex—bypassing, in any way, a person's ability to choose for themselves whether or not they will have sex. These acts all exist on a spectrum of severity, and that spectrum is called rape.

While rapists can be women, the majority of rape is carried out by men. The condition of the world we live in is called “patriarchy,” where men hold most positions of power in society and where physical and sexual domination of women by men is the norm. Rape is a tool that is used by men to keep women weak and afraid and unable to move freely and act on their desires for fear they will be raped.

Rapists also target all sorts of people who are weaker than them: transgendered people, gay men, children, people in prison, disabled people, etc. In each case, the result is rapists maintaining a culture of domination of one group over another. We dream of a very different world.

When we say we dream of a world in which rapists, as well as prisons, do not exist, we do not expect that this world will come to pass without struggle. And just as we dream of burning prisons to the ground, we dream of acting out our bloodiest desires on rapists who have shown they don't care at all about what other people want.

Along with rapists and prisons, we don't want the State to exist. We dream of a world where we could seek solutions to our problems outside of courts and cops and jails. In the world we envision, a variety of closely-knit crews, street organizations, gangs, affinity groups (whatever you wanna call them) deal with the rapists among us themselves—by using their own violence and not relying on the violence of the cops to solve their problems. This is both a vision of the world we want and the concrete means by which we can begin to come together to respond to rapists and other predators now.

Of course, violence is not the only appropriate tool for dealing with rapists. Many of us have harmed our friends, lovers or families. Many of us have violated their trust or their sexual safety and have to live with that reality. Some rapists take seriously what they have done, try to look deeply at themselves to see where those behaviors came from, and vow to do something different in the future. In these instances, these people need

Continued on page 7



A RESPONSE continued

the help of friends in getting to the bottom of these issues and healing whatever is there.

But still many others around us do not think their actions are a problem, and these people do not deserve our patience and cannot be dealt with peacefully.

Historically, there has been a strong culture of sexual violence and rape within prisons. Over the years, we have heard stories of rape, sexual abuse and even ritual sexual torture from people in prison. Much of this rape has been carried out by guards, admin and others in power, but the reality of inmate-on-inmate predation within prison is very real. There are some examples of prisoners coming together to challenge rape culture and sexual slavery within prisons, such as a group called Men Against Sexism that existed at Walla Walla state prison in Washington in the late 70's.

What these experiments found is that, like all groups of people facing a systematic oppression, prisoners prey on each other less when they are coming together to resist their real enemy—in this case, the prison and those who maintain it. Sexual predation, just like racism and inmate-on-inmate gang violence, benefits those in power by keeping the prison population weak, divided and at war with itself. Prison admins fear a united and socially-conscious prisoner population that does not prey on itself, because it knows that prisons cannot function

without prisoners maintaining their own incarceration.

We hate prisons, and we seek coordinated struggle against them. We feel in solidarity with those who resist the conditions of their confinement, and we seek the deepening of these struggles and their coordination with actions by groups of people on the outside. But the same hatred we feel toward prisons, we feel toward rape and rapists as well, as these different struggles against domination cannot be separated from each other.

If you'd like to read more about sexual assault and the struggle against it, the following zines are available by request from Oak Root Press: *Learning Good Consent*; *The Anti-Exploits of Men Against Sexism*; *On Women and Violence*; *This is Not a Love Story: Armed Struggle Against the Institutions of Patriarchy*.



A ZINE EXCERPT

What follows is an excerpt from the essay "Imprisoned and Segregated," found in Queer Fire: The George Jackson Brigade, Men Against Sexism, and Gay Struggle Against Prison, a zine compilation of essays about the armed struggle group The George Jackson Brigade (GJB). The GJB, named after prison rebel and political theorist George Jackson. It contained both anarchist and communist members, many of whom were queer, women, and ex-cons, and carried out a series of bombings and attacks against structures of domination in the U.S. One such attack was the bombing of Department of Corrections building in Olympia. The following excerpt was written by GJB member Ed Mead about his time locked up at Walla Walla State prison in Washington after being convicted of the murder of a cop during a failed GJB bank robbery.

As days melted into months I fell into the day-to-day routine of life on B Tier, and, to some extent, was able to communicate with prisoners on the other three tiers of Big Red through the vents located in the back of each of our cells. But mostly I did a lot of talking with my fellow cons on the tier, particularly Danny, Joe, Mark, and Carl, all of whom had participated in the December 1974 takeover of sections of the prison. I learned there had been long periods of spontaneous resistance to conditions in segregation, a resistance that sometimes took violent forms. From what I could gather the battle would run hot and cold, sort of like the principle seasons in that remote corner of Washington state. A few months earlier there had been tough fighting; a guard or two having been taken hostage by seg prisoners, convicts being beaten by their captors, prisoners throwing fecal matter on the cops as they came on to the tier, and the cops putting urine, bleach, and soap chips in the food and drink before serving it to the locked down prisoners. Then at some point there would be a change, a few token concessions tossed out by the warden, and the season of struggle would suddenly change again to one of peace and cooperation.

Continued on page 8

A ZINE EXCERPT continued

Many of those who had participated in the earlier protests, like Kevin and Andy, would become friends with the cops (or at least certain of them), and those guards, our former enemies, would in turn pull trips like opening the prisoner's door for the attempted rape that took place on my first night in the unit. At that particular moment, the season was currently one of peace between the keepers and the kept in Walla Walla's segregation unit. That was the time when we most often victimized each other.

There was another young kid on B Tier, an innocent 20 year-old whose principle crime was probably one of being more confused than those around him. The youngster did not bother anyone else on the tier, and for the brief time he was with us tried to mind his own business. One night two guys on the tier, a couple of the wanna-be toughs, passed themselves off as new found friends to the kid by giving him some barbiturates. Once the young man was groggy from the drugs, the two of them went into his open cell and raped him. Then, in an effort to conceal their crime, they made him take a shower. Upon his return to the cell the two of them strangled the kid to death, then tied one end of a bed sheet around the victim's neck and the other end to the bars, and arranged the body so as to make it appear as if the youngster had committed suicide. While the police did not fall for the suicide ruse, they charged and convicted only one prisoner with the kid's murder. The other one made parole a short time later and went home. I've seen this sort of thing happen on more than one occasion; someone kills and/or rapes another person, then is turned right around and released. It was not the release but the murder that so deeply disturbed me.

Why did that happen? Why did prisoners prey on each other like that? One possible clarification, at least one that provided me with some measure of understanding, came from Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth*. Fanon was an Algerian psychiatrist who was educated in France, during the period France colonialized his homeland. He wrote about his observations of the process through which his people developed the capacity to struggle against French imperialism. I will badly paraphrase what Mr. Fanon had to say on the subject of violence among the oppressed: The phenomena is essentially part of a much needed cleansing process, one that prepares a nation for the struggle for liberation and revolution.

The Algerians in Fanon's book, not unlike Blacks in the ghettos of America or prisoners in the nation's gulags, internalized the oppression they were experiencing, and tended to take it out on each other in the form of what could be characterized as acts of self-hatred. This was not that unusual, considering the fact that the tribal people of Algeria considered the French colonialists to be gods of sorts, who could not be killed. Fanon noted that at first this violence manifested itself through intra-family

conflicts; husbands beating their wives, women violently abusing their children, and so on. This domestic violence, according to Fanon, then slowly transformed itself into intra-tribal conflict. Men within the tribe drank and fought with each other, resulting in many deaths and injuries. The next phase of the process was one of inter-tribal violence, where now more or less united tribes fought against each other. As the process continued to unfold, the tribes, now skilled in the application of violence, came together for the final phase. They started fighting the French occupiers and were eventually able to drive the foreign army from their land.

While I had some appreciation as to why prisoners would be preying on each other, I was nonetheless angry at the prisoner who killed the weaker youngster. The killer could not understand why I was so pissed; why his act of murdering someone else, not even a friend of mine, would bother me. He and I did not get along well after that. He was one of those people who for all his miserable life had been told he was a piece of shit, and he was treated accordingly. He ended up believing it, and behaved like a piece of shit. He had a lot of company in that regard, too. So there were conflicting trends in Big Red, and the prison in general. On the one hand there was this kind of cannibalism, with the prisoners raping and killing each other. And on the other hand, just as intense periods of blind, self-destructive resistance. I wanted to make prisoners more conscious and to lower their self-destructiveness. I knew it was going to be an uphill struggle.

The full version of this essay is available in a compilation zine entitled Queer Fire: The George Jackson Brigade, Men Against Sexism, and Gay Struggle Against Prison by request.

WRITE TO US

IF YOU WANT TO RECEIVE A ZINE CATALOG//
BE ADDED OR REMOVED FROM THE MAILING
LIST//TELL US WHAT'S GOING ON WHERE YOU
ARE OR WHAT YOU WANT TO HEAR ABOUT!

**OAK ROOT PRESS
PO BOX 775006
ST LOUIS, MO 63177**

We do not know anything about the law so we cannot help with legal support. We are also not a dating service. So please do not ask us for those kind of things. If you are a rapist of any kind, and you don't think that is a problem, do not bother writing to us. We dream of a world where rapists, along with prisons, do not exist.