

Dear Friends,

As you probably know, in 1985 and 1986 we held day-long conferences at the end of October to commemorate the imposition of the Marion lockdown on October 27, 1983. This year, we combined efforts with the National Committee to Free Puerto Rican Prisoners of War and the National Campaign to Abolish the Lexington Women's Control Unit to sponsor a People's Tribunal. The end of October is now an even more infamous time since the Lexington Control Unit opened on October 20, 1986.

In preparation for the Tribunal, we spoke to several groups of people, often using our slide show as an entry point. The slide show, which we have been working on for about six months, is now completed, refined, and ready to go. It lasts about 30 minutes and we would very much appreciate opportunities to show it. If you can arrange a showing, please let us know. We also worked hard to build a speaking tour for Morton Sobell at the beginning of October to build for the Tribunal. Morton, who was a co-defendant with Ethel and Julius Rosenberg, was sentenced to 30 years in prison at his world famous "spy trial," and served 20 of them - starting with five at Alcatraz. He has been a long time supporter of efforts to abolish the Control Units and generously agreed to come to Chicago, not only for the Tribunal, but also on a previous trip to help build for the Tribunal.

The Tribunal started at about noon with registration and a great deal of literature. (Eventually over 300 people would attend the day's activities.) There was also a tour of a full-size model of a Control Unit cell built by CEML members to specification. Many of the people who stepped into the cell were deeply impressed by its starkness. During the next two hours, we showed a video about the Lexington Control Unit and the women incarcerated there, a slide show that described the Stanford University prison experiment (in which college students were locked in a model prison in a basement for a weekend and forced to adopt roles as either guards or prisoners), and the Marion slide show.

At about 3:00 PM everyone moved up to the Sanctuary and prepared to listen to testimony that would be offered by 17 witnesses to expose the crimes of Marion and Lexington. After the nine people who would judge the evidence were introduced, Jose Lopez, national coordinator of the Movimiento de Liberacion Nacional, presented us with the indictment against the wardens of Marion and Lexington, the director of the Bureau of Prisons, Attorney General Edwin Meese, and the F.B.I.

Then the testimony started with the relatives of four prisoners speaking first. Manny Rosenberg, the father of Susan (Lexington); Rev. Mary Warner, the mother of Anthony (Marion); Rev. Ted Blunk, the father of Tim (Marion); and Rev. Jose Torres, the husband of Alejandrina (Lexington) all spoke forcefully and sometimes tearfully, about the brutal treatment of their relatives. They also pointed out that despite the barbaric treatment, their family members retained their strength, basic humanity and sometimes even a good sense of humor.

The next group of speakers elaborated on the nature of the brutal conditions at Marion and Lexington. We first heard the tape recorded voice of David Hale, former Marion Prison guard. Then came Phil Scopelito, an editor and publisher, who has written a series of editorials exposing the conditions in Marion. Bindu Desai, a member of Amnesty International spoke next and summarized the recent AI report condemning Marion (the first time AI has ever written a report about a U.S. prison). Bindu was followed by Don Goldhammer, who summarized a report released the day before by the Illinois Jails and Prisons Project of the John Howard Association, also condemning Marion. The next speaker was Susuana Schlesinger, a psychologist, who testified against the debilitating effects of the Lexington Control Unit, as did Ellen Youniss, who summarized a recently released ACLU report exposing the devastating effects of Lexington. The final speaker in this group was Shelley Miller, who refused to cooperate with a grand jury that was investigating the Puerto Rican Independence Movement, and was sent to prison for three years as a result. Shelley testified vividly about the effects that prison had on her as a political prisoner.

The third group consisted of three lawyers who have worked long and hard with the prisoners at Lexington and Marion. Nancy Horgan spoke about the conditions at Marion and the futility of relying on the courts for relief. As Nancy pointed out, the people had to make the judgement - and then act accordingly. Melinda Power spoke next about the constant sexual abuse that has been directed at the women at Lexington. She stated that the U.S. had built this special prison for women because it perceived them to be the weaker sex, but noted that the determination of the women was undiminished. Jan Susler finished the session by again urging that we wait no longer and refuse to

tolerate the inhumanity of the Control Units.

Representatives of two of the sponsoring organizations spoke next. They raised the major point that prisons are part and parcel of the government's attempt to commit genocide against Black people, and that it was the responsibility of people to get involved in the work and to help build a better society.

The final group to present testimony consisted of Ashanti Chimurenga, representing the New Afrikan Independence Movement and Jaime Delgado, the national coordinator of the National Committee to Free Puerto Rican Prisoners of War. Ashanti spoke eloquently about the conditions of life for Black people in this country and the impact on her people of locking up huge numbers of Black men. She detailed both the pain and the beauty of struggle and resistance among Black people. Jaime spoke about his trial, the issue of Puerto Rican Prisoners of War, and the need for Puerto Rican Independence.

This completed the testimony and we broke for a delicious dinner prepared by the National Committee to Free Puerto Rican Prisoners of War. We then returned to the Sanctuary to hear the judges' verdicts.

First to speak was Betty Balanoff, professor of history at Roosevelt University, who saw the context of the Control Units and prisons embedded in the history of the United States - beginning with the slaughter of Native Americans. Darla Bradley, a Plowshares activist recently released from prison, spoke about her experiences inside, the way in which the prison authorities try to divide and conquer, and how difficult it is to maintain one's equilibrium when locked up. Dave Dellinger spoke next. Dave has been a peace, anti-intervention and civil rights activist for over 50 years. He elaborated on why the prison situation was so crucial, and how, as Dostoevsky said, prisons are a reflection of our society and thus vividly indicate the nature of oppression heaped upon Black people by our white supremacist system. Dora Garcia, a long-time Puerto Rican Independentista and a leader to abolish the Lexington Control Unit, spoke next about her trial, the pain and suffering caused by Marion and Lexington, and the need to shut them down. Bernard Headley, chair of the Department of Criminal Justice at Northeastern Illinois University, detailed a long list of constitutional violations on the part of Marion and Lexington and declared them illegal and cruel and unusual punishment. Jean Hughes, a leader of the Central American anti-intervention movement spoke next. Jean spoke of her feelings of rage and outrage about the Control Units and stated that she was willing to do anything creative to shut them down; anything but write any more letters to Congress since, she maintained, Congress was part of the problem. The next speaker was Morton Sobell. Morton described in detail his five years in Alcatraz and maintained that Marion was far worse - the symbol of a prison system out of control. The final judge was Akinyela Umoja, National Secretary of the New Afrikan People's Organization. Umoja maintained that prison was a necessary part of the U.S. empire that was devoted to the oppression of New Afrikans and other people of color. He also traced the origins of the empire from stolen Native lands to slavery to stolen northern Mexico to colonized Puerto Rico and noted that only dissolution of the empire would bring about true freedom.

After the judges voted unanimously to find the defendants guilty as charged, the audience was asked to vote. In one voice we shouted "GUILTY!" and then when asked by the chair to speak louder, shouted "GUILTY!" again. The day ended with sustained applause for the courageous prisoners at Marion and Lexington.

The day was the culmination of three months of activity but does not allow us to believe that we could rest. Instead the words of the witnesses and the judges, along with the spirit of the audience, indicated that we must persevere. There have been some recent victories. Last year while we demonstrated in front of the Lexington Control Unit, the prison officials announced that they would repaint the Unit, which had been a blinding, disorienting white - into a soft beige. Just a few weeks ago, the Bureau of Prisons announced that they would close the Lexington Control Unit - but not for nine more months. And New Afrikan POWs Sundiata Acoli and Sekou Odinga have been transferred out of Marion, in large part, they believe, because of our protests.

But we must of course do much more. We must guarantee that Lexington is shut down NOW, and that the women are not sent to punitive isolation cells elsewhere. We must End the Lockdown at Marion. And we must assure that no more Control Units are ever constructed. Energies are high as plans have started in earnest for the December 19 demonstration. JOIN US!