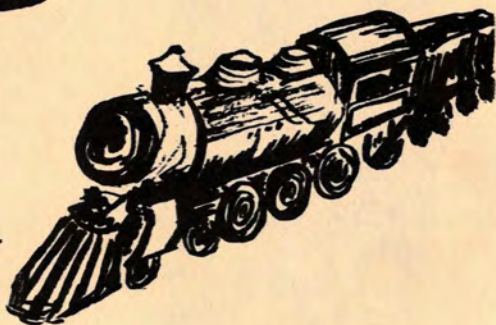


The Midnight Special is published by a coalition of prisoner support groups in New York City with the aim of disseminating legal information which will be a direct help in securing and expanding prisoner rights, and of providing news of the situation within the prisons from the prisoners' point of view. We will publish articles, letters, poems and art work by prisoners. We have a small staff and little money, so aside from what we print in Midnight Special, we are NOT able to help prisoners individually with their legal problems.

MIDNIGHT SPECIAL

PRISONERS NEWS



PUBLISHED BY THE NATIONAL LAWYERS GUILD (N.Y.CHAPTER)
AND THE PRISON JUSTICE COMMITTEE

The Women's Bail Fund works with the coalition of groups which puts out the Midnight Special. Reprinted here are some of the articles which we have contributed to it.

In June, 1971 New York City's infamous Women's House of Detention shipped out its inmates to the newly constructed New York City Correctional Facility for Women. The sisters were moved very early in the morning with no advance notice. The city department of Corrections was afraid to face the demonstrators angry that the sisters were being sent to the isolated penal colony.

The Department of Corrections, in an effort to blunt increasing agitation from the outside community, outdid its usually tepid news releases in praising the new facility at Rikers Island. Mayor Lindsay gushed that the new

prison would be a "home to help" and declared "there is no price we shouldn't pay to rebuild lives in our city." Corrections Commissioner McGrath called the new facility "the city's most unique hotel."

The city spent \$16 to \$24 million on its new showplace penal colony. Corrections authorities touted Rikers for its "college campus design." The women at Rikers know that no amount of "good press" can justify the construction of yet another inadequate, inhuman, and unnecessary prison. Inside their "model prison" they struggle under the same brutal and inhuman conditions as their sisters and brothers in jails

all over the United States. A jail is a jail—and bail is still a way of keeping poor sisters and brothers in jail.

The women at Rikers Penal Colony are, in fact, worse off than when they were incarcerated in the old House of Detention. Rikers was deliberately designed to isolate the sisters from each other and from their families, lawyers, communities, and from their active supporters on the outside. Situated in the middle of Queens and adjacent to the constant noise of LaGuardia jet traffic, Rikers is accessible from Manhattan only by a special bus trip taking at least one hour.

Inside the prison the authorities have brought to bear their most sterile, brutal technology to keep the sisters apart. The solid steel doors of their tiny cells open and close only by a central electronic switchboard. The women are often locked into their cells for 15-16 hours per day. They see each other only as they are being marched about the building and their communication is greatly hindered by the physical set-up of the prison. Lights are kept on in the cells 24 hours a day: many sisters must sleep under their beds if they are to sleep at all. The prison's public address system

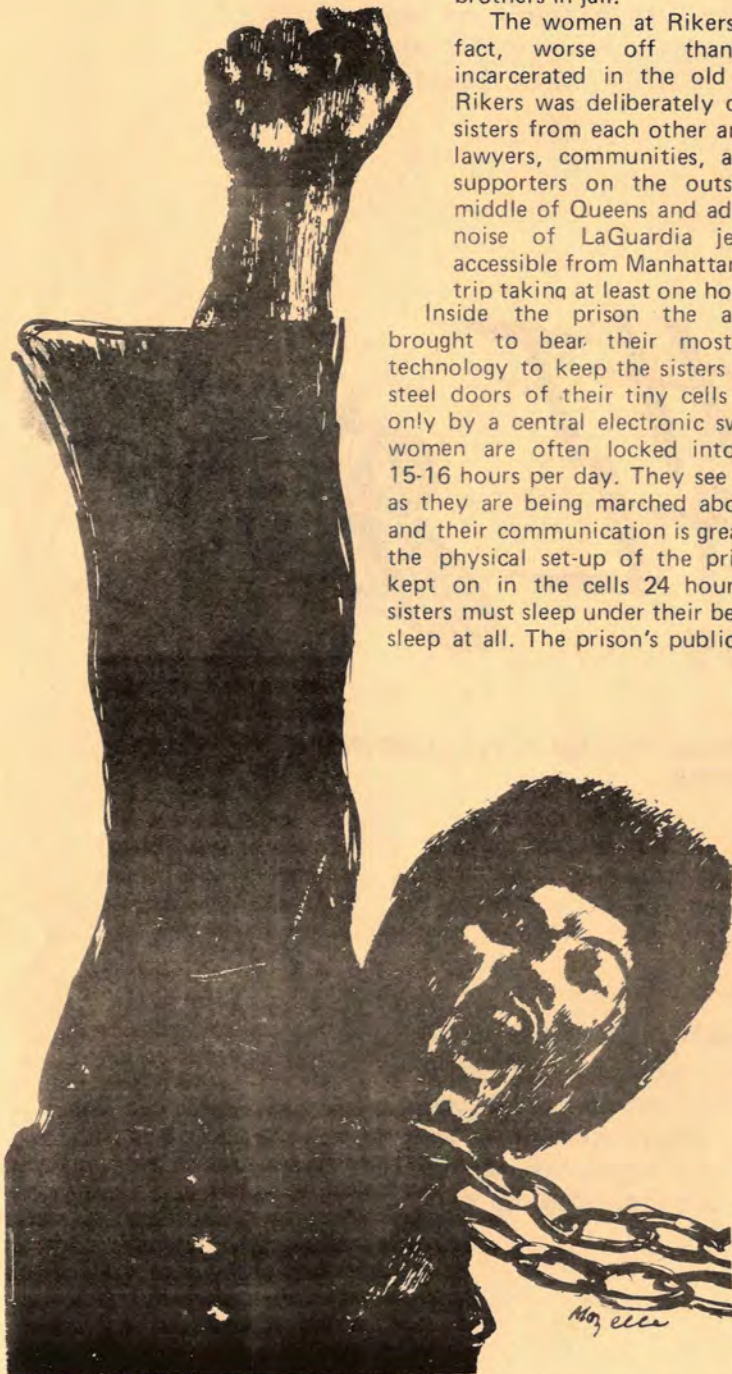
penetrates every cell and cannot be switched off. Recently authorities used this system to broadcast, at 11 p.m., a recording of hysterical laughter.

Like their sisters and brothers in prisons elsewhere, the sentenced women at Rikers are conscripts for forced labor. Women work for up to 10 cents an hour. Most women do not make enough money to buy bare necessities like toiletries and cigarettes from the rip-off commissary.

Most sisters at Rikers have never seen the much-publicized educational and recreational facilities. On the excuse of lack of guards for escort, the women cannot get outdoor exercise or the use of any of the facilities. Medical care at Rikers is totally inadequate and the food is mostly starch.

There are, in effect, two Rikers prisons. One is the image of the "model prison" presented by the authorities and most of the press. The other is the Rikers that the women prisoners must endure every day. Increasing numbers of people on the outside are becoming aware of the real Rikers and are uniting to support the struggle of their sisters and brothers in prisons everywhere.

A JAIL IS A JAIL

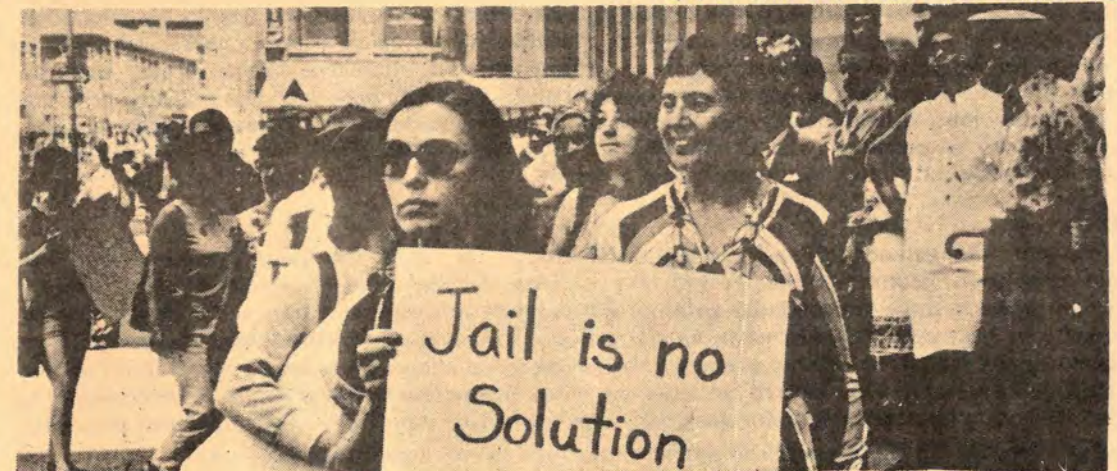


(From M.S. vol.1 no.1)

ALDERSON REBELLION

There are 53 women's prisons in the United States. Most people have never heard of any of them. Recently, the President's Commission on Law Enforcement published a massive document on criminal justice and the prison system. This study makes no mention of women, yet there are more than 10,000 women in prison in the United States.

Some of these forgotten women have recently reminded the country of their existence. These are the inmates of the Federal Reformatory for Women in Alderson, West Virginia. The Alderson women began a sympathy demonstration for the brothers at Attica on September 14. Perhaps the authorities and experts were surprised when the Alderson sisters presented their own demands because Alderson is regarded as a "model prison."



Alderson has about 500 inmates who are serving time for a variety of Federal offenses. Its population includes a number of radical women sentenced for political offenses such as destroying draft files.

The Alderson women live in cottages and are permitted to decorate their rooms and wear their own clothes. They may have radios in their rooms and may watch television any time they are not working. Women who deliver babies in the prison may have a five-day leave to take the children home to their families.

Most of the Alderson sisters work in the prison garment factory making uniforms for men's prisons and for the Veteran's Administration. Pay for this work is seven cents per hour. The Alderson warden, Virginia McLaughlin is quoted as saying ("Ramparts," June, 1971) "I tell the women, you can spend all your time here fighting the cops and the system—or you can reach out for the things in this system which can be of benefit to you."

At the time of Attica, a large number of the Alderson women decided to fight. Apparently, the sisters found their "model prison" just like any other jail for they conclude their list of demands by saying: "The overall system of prisons from court to institution is designed primarily against a selective group of people, as statistics prove. The ultimate goal is abolition of the prison system."

During the week of September 14, about 200 of the Alderson women took over and stayed in the building which had once been used for the prison garment factory. These sisters presented 42 grievances to the prison administration. Included were demands for more pay for work, better medical care, improved diet, immediate answers from the parole board, the establishment of a work release program, more vocational training, and the right to send and receive mail uncensored.

On September 18, the strike was broken by guards from the Federal prisons at Ashland, Kentucky and Morgantown, West Virginia. These male guards were armed with clubs and tear gas.

When the women held a memorial service for the murdered Attica brothers, the authorities responded by transferring 66 of the women, termed "ringleaders" to a maximum security prison in Ashland, Kentucky. Thirty-seven women refused to go and tear gas was used to force them into the bus. Thus, the "showcase prison" is shown to be just like any other where force and violence is used on those who attempt to exercise their basic human rights.

On October 2, demonstrators gathered outside Alderson to show solidarity with the prisoners and to protest conditions at the prison. This action was supported by numerous groups concerned about the American prison system including the Prisoner Solidarity Committee. The courageous Alderson sisters will not be forgotten, either by the prison authorities or by their many supporters on the outside.

(From M.S. vol.1 no.2)

WOMEN'S BAIL FUND

The Women's Bail Fund in New York City:

- bails women out of the New York City women's prison. In the last year we have bailed out 130 women with money we raise from contributions.
- goes to court with women when their cases come up, finds lawyers for or talks to the Legal Aid lawyers who represent the women who have been bailed out. We never tell a woman to go to court so that we will get our money back. She knows what's best for her. If she decides to show, we're there to support her.
- helps women inside with their cases, gets bail reduction hearings for women.
- plans actions, writes articles and talks to groups about the conditions in the prisons and our demand that all prisoners be released immediately.
- corresponds with women inside.
- investigates cases of brutality which we hear about from women inside.
- supports all demands and struggles of prisoners.

We take these actions as our part in the struggle to free all prisoners. We know that the prisons and the courts are used as weapons against poor and Third World people. The only "crime" committed by some of the defendants is the fact that they are black or poor. We know that bails which would not seem high to a judge are often sufficient to lock people up away from their families and friends, to keep them from getting their cases together, to force them to lose their jobs or to have their children taken away from them. We know that a past record means automatic conviction and future arrests, that the definition of crime is made to protect property and power. What the people of this country need are more and better jobs, decent health care, decent housing, free child care, and respect—NOT prisons. Prisons are a way of penalizing the people who are the most oppressed for their own oppression and keeping them locked up so they will not demand a change.

HISTORY

We did our first bail-out of two women on December 20, 1970, the Tenth Anniversary of the National Liberation Front and held a big rally outside the old Women's House of Detention in Greenwich Village to show our solidarity with our sisters inside and with our sisters and brothers fighting in Vietnam. We held up a big sheet with our address on it so that the sisters inside could write to tell us their bails. Very soon we found that prison authorities were not allowing any letters to the Bail Fund or from the Bail Fund or its members to be delivered to the prison. Nonetheless we had communications with women inside and continued our work. We soon learned to stand across the street and shout up, "Who has a low bail?" Sisters would risk punishment inside to yell their names out to us.

This direct communication was also stopped when the women were moved to Rikers Island. Over 100 people rallied from 5:30 a.m. the day the women were moved. We had to show our sisters we would not forget them once they were at Rikers. Now they are two transit fares and over an hour's ride from most parts of the city. But we still communicate with individuals in the prison. Letters have recently been getting through. We know lawyers and others who call us when they come across a woman in prison with a low bail. The move has not stopped the work of the Bail Fund, just as it has not stopped the brutal treatment of prisons, just as it has not stopped the desire of the sisters inside to get out.

On January 13, 1972, four months after the heroic uprising at Attica, members of the Women's Bail Fund along with other groups involved in the prison struggle, demonstrated by the bridge to Rikers Island to show our solidarity with all prisoners. We were greeted by cops from four precincts as well as Finnigan from the Red Squad. They had barricades across the street and were redirecting traffic.

Nevertheless, busloads of imprisoned brothers and sisters returning from court and buses of relatives going to visit the jails, saw us, heard us and yelled back to us.

WHO DO WE BAIL OUT?

Women with relatively low bails. As we get names of women we check them out and bail them out. If, at any time we do not have enough money to bail out all the women whose names we have, we bail out first: pregnant women, sick women, women with families which need taking care of, women who have been in for a long time. The prisoners themselves should be making the decisions of

who gets bailed out, but until they can do this and communicate it to us, these are our guidelines.

When we bail out a woman, she is under no obligation to us at all. She is welcome to join the Bail Fund or work with us in any way that she wants to. So is any woman who has been in prison anywhere.

Box 637, Cooper Station, N.Y., N.Y. 10003. That's our address. Please write to us, sisters. Even if we cannot bail you out, we want to know what's happening inside. We don't want you isolated from us.

POWER!

From M.S., Vol. 2, no. 1.