

This has been sitting at the back of my brain for months by now, and I figure its about time to at least take a poke at it. It's been a good year and a half since I've been out and I want to take the time to review what that time has been about, take stock of all the gains, problems, lessons and where it leaves me now, looking toward the months ahead.

One thing I've come to understand more and more as time goes by is what a water mark, changing point, defining time my time inside was. In many ways. Some, in terms of the actual experience putting me so much in touch with the roots of my politics, with the experience of being surrounded by a thrid world reality and struggle, with seeing ourselves, our own role so much in the perspective of that reality, always playing out the balance of tuning into that energy, opening up, ~~swing~~ swaying within its rhythmns and demands and then having to find ourselvew, our own, separate identity/culture/needs/visions.

All that, it seems to me, was one of the strongest legacies of those months inside. But there were also a lot of problems left from that time, and even more ~~fr~~ problems with making the transition from in to out. Coming out to a point in the movement very different than what I had experienced. Beginnings of rough times. Little togetherness, lëttle definition, clarity, leadership, struggle, collectivity, support. And fore myself, the hardness of a lot haivng to begin to rebuild a life for myself, find new people, new work, a way to survive. I think its taken me a long time to understand how very very hard it was/is to be separated from the people

who had, for the most part, been my total life for several years, with whom I had figured out my political directions, personal development/survival scene.

Anyway, that's basically background to what I want to focus into, which is the year and a half working with the b-fund, since that represents a large chunk of my life and within that experience lies most of the themes/problems/political realities that are important to ~~xxx~~ clarify.

I first got interested in the bail fund for a number of reasons. I wanted to do some kind of political work around prisons. Obviously, I felt close to that because of my own past year and doing some kind of prison work, it seemed to me, could ^{lead} ~~lead~~ some ~~xxxxxxx~~ continuity to my life--which at that time seemed like such a crazy, disjointed, always disrupted, somewhat devastated ^{ated} existence. Also, I felt very strongly, that people in prison were a very important front in the movement in this country, that within the walls throughout this country, people were achieving a new level of ^{collective} struggle, /militancy/~~collective struggle~~/humanity that all had much relevancy to people on the outside. That ~~is~~ was important to build strong ties between in and out, for people on the outside had much to learn from those in, for in some ways the reality within was just ~~xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx~~ a concentrated parallel to conditions on the outside. Much of that, clearly has to do with the prison movement being ~~ax~~ very much defined and led by third world people, very much a product of racism/ and an integral part of a larger third world movement. And my own sense was that it was important ~~xx~~ that white people begin to develop ~~xxx~~ a consciousness

about that struggle, to develop ties with it, and ways to support it and be a part of it.. I also wanted to work with women. Again, my time in ~~am~~ had clarified for me my own feelings that there was a special and important energy created by women living/working/being together, that I felt most able to communicate with and understand other sisters. Not to sound trite, but I find that sisterhood, is, indeed, a very powerful force, that women coming together, beginning to understand their own lives/oppression/strengths, creates a farout kind of energy that helps to build true bands with other sisters/third world sisters/poor sisters/ sisters inside the prisons. The other thing I felt, or at least was beginning to feel, was that I wanted to work with new people, make new friends, break out of the constructions of a limited movement reality and past and my own box within that.

So I decided to check out the bail fund. Almost ~~x~~ immediately I felt certain very positive things about the group. First, here was a group of sisters who, if there had any unifying political perspective, it was their sense of the necessity to relate to third world struggles, give support and look to organizing other white people around that need. Secondly, the group seemed very diversified and certainly different from where I was coming from. Some of the sisters seemed to have long histories in the movement, dating back to the civil rights movement. Some others seemed very new to it all. There were women of all ages. There were mothers. There were married women, women living in communes, women alone, even a couple of gay sisters. AND NONE OF THEM KNEW ME OR HAD ANY PRE-CONCEPTIONS OF ME (or so I naively thought then!) Third. They

actually did, concrete, day to day work, lent concrete material support to sisters inside, were consistent in that practice. At a time when I felt much vacuousness in the movement and ~~my~~ in my own political life, this was a very definite plus.

But that is now¹ to say that I just quickly and easily jumped into that scene. I had many reservations. Many of the women seemed so "straight" and older and hardly "militant" and no one talked about support for ~~the group~~^{a.s.}. And sure it would be good to make some connections with them, but I could^{not} at that point, have imagined making that group central in my life, or see those women as my closest friends. And besides which what would they think of me?...So I started out with much caution. Each week, I wasn't totally sure I'd go to the next meeting. Yet each week I found myself there. And slowly I got into doing some of the day to day work of the group. I joined a committee. (one of the good things about how the group worked was that in addition to ~~xx~~ each sister coming to once a week general meetings, each member had to belong to a work committee, so that people had to be involved with the actual work of the group--either coordinating the actual bail outs--~~deciding who to bail out, or going to court with the sisters, or~~ coordinating fund raising or developing propaganda and arranging speaking events and figuring out ways of reaching people on the outside and raising consciousness about prisons.) I joined that last committee--the education committee, cause I wanted to help work out how we took the knowledge and understanding about our sisters in jail and communicated that to others. It was in large part my work with my committee that ~~brought me into the group~~ deepened and broadened my involvement in the group and the people.

I went through a lot of changes and development through my involvement. One major change had to do with my own sense of who I was, my role in the group and in the broader movement. The bail fund was incredibly important to me in giving me a basis to develop an independent, open political identity. ~~xxxxxx~~ At some point, early on, I came to understand that I had to accept the ~~px~~ group and the people in the group on its own terms, and to see myself and just one more individual within it, representing no more than myself ~~and~~ and the politics and experience I brought. This was a very freeing thing, allowing me to be more open about myself, and to develop free-wheeling, mutual political relations. I wasn't "working for someone/thing", wasn't "recruiting". For sure I was into organizing people, but not in narrow terms, but broadly organizing around a certain set of politics. I think I learned to be more open, be able to "hear" people who talked out of different perspectives than my own. One of the ways that I came to understand the importance of that lack of sectarian motives was seeing the effect of others, particularly YAWF women, who basically were into organizing people into YAWF, as opposed to building the politics of the bail fund. Even when what they were pushing was progressive, their effect was so often negative. They made people feel manipulated and used and unrespected and in fact they often depoliticized the struggles within the group, by making others react and focus in on the issue of manipulation and ulterior motives and deflected from the basic political questions and differences that existed in the group. I learned that basically each of us can but organize people to a political perspective and that the process of organizing must be a mutual one where I am open to change and approach people with the same respect I expect from them.

At the same time, I ~~am~~ now think that there were times when I should have been more articulate and "up front" with my political perspective. I think that I was too worried about being "sectarian" and in that fear, did not raise questions, or pin down contradictions I saw, or clearly take stands when I should have. And this worked into a general problem that existed in the group of a lack of political clarity. So many times, real political differences got blurred into personal clashes of and mistrusts and therefore festered and ~~we~~ eventually dragged us down into a quagmire, where they could have been progressive contradictions that could have led to a further development for the group's collective politics and direction. This is not too say that I didn't play a heavy role in the group, for that I certainly did. But I think that my role would have been more fruitful if I had been more into ~~raising~~ speaking out of ~~my~~ all the dimensions of my politics. ~~Some~~ There were times when it would have been right to raise the issue of militancy or to push out more into the open why we should relate to third world struggles (always a question in the group--Is it right to focus our political work in an area that doesn't directly affect white people? Should we be a "support group".) or to raise more clearly the differences that were clearly in the group around the question of nationalism. Let me give a couple of examples. Towards the end of the summer the group entered a period of extreme crisis. Some I think that crisis was one of identity, that ~~in~~ we more and more felt the need to clarify and develop our identity ~~as a group~~ not just as a prison support group, but as a revolutionary group. How to do that. One thing that was raised was that developing political education could give us more ~~of a~~ ~~clear~~ direction. Some of us proposed a beginning reading list that concentrated on things written by prisoners and on various Black writers (George Jackson, Malcolm, Forman) who focused on the issues of

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I went through a lot of changes in the year and a half with the bail fund in my perspective on the issue of racism/ the relationship of the white movement to third world movement/people/struggle. When I first came into the group it was a predominantly white group and there

was much question of the viability of that situation. At the time, I saw no problem with that. After all, my line on nationalism meant that clearly whites and blacks/Puerto Ricans would work separately, each on our own front. We as a white group could lend support to third world people in prison and use that experience as a basis to organize other white people to relate to third world struggles. Through the months I came to see that as much too pat a formula. For one thing, that total separation and distance from black/brown people has meant that so many peoples' understandings about racism are very abstract, that the concept of third world leadership remains just that--a concept, rather than a concrete and changing reality that we struggle with. In meant that in the bail fund, many sisters had very little direct contact with prisoners, so that on the one hand people had a romanticized, correct leftist conception of "all prisoners are political prisoners" and on the other had all the hassles of helping sisters around welfare, drug problems/ etc. gave people a sense of people being completely untogether. More of a priority should have gone into building on-going relationships with people inside, particularly with sisters who were trying to do political work. And more and more I think that its an unreal, artificial thing for white people to do work in such a clearly third world defined area such as prisons without some kind of on-going relationship with black/brown people who are also doing prison work. I think that contact is necessary to make real our struggle around our own racism, as well as draw us closer and help us identify with the realities and stakes of the third world struggles. In the end I think that closer ties with third world people would have pushed us harder to develop more ways to reach other white people, because it puts us more in touch with the urgent necessity for that support. Now how those relationships should get built are a whole other question that I continue to face.

~~When~~ My work in the bail fund deepened my own sense of involvement with the prison struggle. Going out to Rikers each time was such an emotional experience. Getting know some of the sisters there. Writing to women inside. Meeting other people doing prison work. To solidify and expand my prison work, I began to work on the Sepcial about a year ago. And that has definitely deepened ~~in~~ my own understanding and identification with people inside. Fore one thing I've just learned so much about all the levels of struggle going on in scores of prisons all over the country. For another, its put me in contact, through letter writing, with more people inside. Some days, its just so heavy. Like, I'll get up in the morning and go to court ~~andxxx~~ for someone I'm writing to who has a court date and then I'll go to the Speical and spend several hours reading letters from people inside and learn about this brother there who was murdered and those brothers there who are on a hunger strike and that sister there who was sent to a mental hospítal and so and so who needs and ~~law~~ lawyer or doctor or just used up thier last sheet of paper to write to us to express their appreciation for our show of revolutionary solidarity! And I feel so immersed in that whole reality. Feel so racked out by how much need there is and how little we are doing. Fæel so much a closeness to a day to day revolutionnary, life and death struggle. And it fills me with much hope and hate and determination and ~~a~~ frustration. And again we see the need to communicate this to more people, relate it to what's happening in people's lives and find ways for people to get involved. It's hard to develope those avenues. For one thing, i've started to do more speaking--at schools, and forums and conferences, reading articles and poems from the Special, and just spæading around the enornous amount of information we have access to. And I've gotten into taking people to court with me some. And I hope to work

with a friend who will be teaching a course on prisons at a local college. And, more generally, I'm trying to take what I'm learning from the prison struggle wherever I go, talk about it in all the other parts of my life, learn more how to draw out its connections with everything else. One thing I'm learning is that ultimately ~~the~~ developing in people a sense of identity with the prison struggle must involve ~~explaining~~ developing a broader analysis ~~and~~ that helps people understand why people are in prison in the first place, that puts it in a revolutionary context, and, of course, in particular zeroes in on the issue of racism. It means talking to white people about black nationalism, cause that a big chunk of the ~~new~~ basis upon which the movement inside is being built. And at the same time we can point out examples of white people inside who have joined in that struggle, found strength and hope in that solidarity and that can provide an example to people on the outside.

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At this point I see myself continuing the work I'm doing on the Special. But I would also like to develop a new basis to focus in on women in prison. Some that's meant beginning to build relationships with a few sisters who have gotten out in the last six months, as well as some sisters in third world groups that relate to prisons. It's interesting to note that my ramblings often have ended up in the same camp as ~~the~~ (though different realms of it). It of course it more than coincidence, but has to do with those folks having a politics that brings them to that same place (at a time when many other groups are moving away from doing prison work). In the long run I would see that our work would need to include a more precise strategy for reaching more people about the need for militant support--perhaps including more many leveled campaigns around demands being raised on the inside that

could include everything from writing letters to prison administrations
and to sit-ins at prison administration offices. I know that the
ways we've developed so far to lend support to people inside are much
too limited and passive. ~~xxxxxxxxxxxx~~