

December, 1971

Dear Friends,

The Women's Bail Fund is one arm of the growing nation-wide prison solidarity movement. During the past year we've raised bail to release over 120 women who have been imprisoned while awaiting trial. We go to court with every woman we've bailed who requests it, and work with them and their lawyers at the various stages of their cases.

Few people realize that 75% of the women and men in New York City's jails are there because they cannot raise bail. The Constitution was written for white propertied males and was not intended to be democratic but in fact to suppress the rights of Blacks and poor people. Yet, even under the Constitution the only legitimate purpose of bail is to insure appearance at trial. In fact, however, the money bail system effectively denies poor people their constitutional right to freedom while awaiting trial. Therefore, what now exists in New York City is preventive detention, where prisons are used as instruments of oppression against the poor, Black and Puerto Rican women and men who cannot raise bail.

Recent rebellions at San Quentin, Attica and Rahway have focused public attention on American prisons. The demands of the prisoners made it obvious that inhuman conditions are characteristic of prisons all over the country. The sisters at Alderson Women's Federal Penitentiary in West Virginia held a strike in support of their Attica brothers' demands. Their strike was brutally suppressed by tear gas, clubs and other reprisals. The treatment of the Alderson women prisoners bears out Angela Davis' statement that, "I have often heard the rumor that as compared to men's prisons, women's institutions are humanely benign...This is a myth which must be immediately smashed. Perhaps it is true that white middle-class women, if they are arrested at all, are given preferential treatment, but for the vast majority of women prisoners—who are Black, Chicano and Puerto Rican—the notion of mildness in the midst of coercion is a blatant misrepresentation."

When the Women's House of Detention was moved from Greenwich Village to its new location on Rikers Island, the new facility was hailed by Mayor Lindsay and correction officials as the "best hotel in town" and a big step forward for "the girls." This is typical of the blatant misrepresentation of women's prisons that Angela described.

The Women's Prison at 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. It takes an hour by special bus from Manhattan just to get to the prison. The steel doors that have replaced the bars at Rikers mean that women have to shout just to communicate with one another. Lights in the cells burn all night forcing some women to sleep on the floor underneath their beds. The women are often locked in their cells for 15-16 hours per day. Like their brothers and sisters in prison elsewhere, the women at Rikers are conscripts for forced labor. They work 35 hours a week but are paid for only 25 hours at the maximum rate of 10 cents an hour. Prison conditions make life on the inside as much a struggle for survival as life on the outside. Recently the women at Rikers mounted a petition campaign articulating their choice of superintendent for Rikers. As they struggle on the inside we can do no less.

In solidarity with prison struggles throughout the country the Women's Bail Fund joins in demanding human conditions throughout the country - the right of prisoners to protest; religious and political freedom; adequate food and medical care; freedom from censorship of mail and literature; standard working conditions, wages and benefits; legal representation at parole board hearings; and the right to seek asylum in non-imperialist countries. The Women's Bail Fund is organizing support for these demands by testifying at public hearings, addressing organizations, disseminating literature and urging people to work for radical restructuring of the legal system, including abolition of the prisons and establishment of community courts.

We are writing to you because people often ask, "What can we do?" One very important way to help us is to send money. During the next month the Women's Bail Fund is conducting intensive fund raising. By bailing our sisters out we express our support for them in the most concrete gesture possible. In January and February the Women's Bail Fund will join with other prisoner solidarity groups in several mass demonstrations commemorating the heroic struggles of our sisters and brothers inside U.S. prisons who have been demanding human rights. Please join us in our efforts and send your contribution soon.

The Women's Bail Fund

Make check payable to: The Women's Bail Fund
Box 637, Cooper Station
New York, N.Y. 10003

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-----Please contact me about a speaker from the Women's Bail
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group, church group)
-----Please send me information about the demonstrations
-----Please send me the Women's Bail Fund literature packet
(75¢) on the prison struggle.

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