

9/13/77

IN December, 1976, a draft copy of what was then tentatively called "Contributions Toward The National Prisoners Movement" was sent to comrades for their criticism and input. In their response, strong opinions were offered regarding two statements made in the draft.

The response indicated to us very fundamental differences in perspective, and theory, which further indicated a difference in practice which we felt would prove (and has proven) harmful.

A rather spontaneous reply was written and sent. What follows is a slight revision of that reply, which has as its purpose: to distinguish the "prison movement" from "struggles in prisons since the 1800's; to define, through analysis, what we recognize as the "prison movement"; to point out the distinctive character of the "prison movement" as inextricably related to the development of the NewAfrikan (Black) struggle for national liberation in particular, and to other national liberation struggles in general; to point up what we see as a "new" role of prisons in america, which departs somewhat from the conventional Marxist-Leninist and/or reformist conception of the "role of prisons in (capitalist) society"; to give some indication of what we see as the reasons that more direction and control over the "prison movement" must come from prisoners; to give some indication of what we see the next phase of struggle being, both in prisons and in america in general.

Our reference to the Soledad Brothers and to Attica (Sept. '71) is really reference to a PERIOD (1970-1971) which we used for the purpose of our analysis, because we think that this PERIOD marks that point at which a clear, qualitative difference in the character of "prison struggles" can be noticed.

"Contributions Toward The National Prisoners Movement" has been revised, and distributed as SPO Discussion Paper #1.

"Opposition and struggle between ideas of different kinds constantly occur within the Party; this is a reflection within the Party of contradictions between classes and between the new and the old in society. If there were no contradictions in the Party and no ideological struggles to resolve them, the Party's life would come to an end."

ON CONTRADICTION, Mao Tse-tung

send response/criticism to:

Stateville Prisoners Organization
Box 6020
Chicago, Illinois 60607

I

STATEMENT

IT'S widely accepted that with the activities surrounding the anticipated trial of Comrade-Brothers George Jackson, Fleeta Drumgo and John Clutchette, there arose what came to be known as the "prison movement."

From the beginning, the "prison movement" was both influenced by, and exerted its own influence upon, the general, overall struggles taking place in america--national liberation and class struggles.

RESPONSE

IT was pointed out that the "prison movement" did not arise around Comrade George Jackson. That statement is not factual and it would be negating the movement/struggle that has been occurring in prisons since the 1800's. The prison movement intensified with the Soledad Brothers, but in no sense did it "arise."

REPLY TO THE RESPONSE

WE think that the criticism/response offered toward the statement is unsound. It's our belief that the failure to understand where we're "coming from" in the statement is essentially due to the reluctance to abandon conventional theoretical models regarding the definition of the role of prisons in america, in particular; and to the failure to abandon incorrect ideological and theoretical models regarding revolutionary and national liberation struggle in america in general--it's evidence of a failure to view things dialectically and to make concrete analysis of concrete conditions.

To understand how the "prison movement" arose during the period marked by the Soledad Brothers' defense activities and the Attica Rebellion, it is necessary to abandon such "lines" on prisons in america as espoused by Jessica Mitford or the Revolutionary Communist Party; it necessitates new, critical, and independent analyses, rather than the continued servile, sterile dependence upon ideological and theoretical constructions which address the peculiar conditions of oppressed nations paternalistically, and say little more than that "prisons are the tools of the capitalist ruling class"; or "prisoners are members of the working class", etc.

We understand the need to learn the history of prisons in america (i.e., where the first one was built); we understand the need to learn how prisons have been used in america over the past several hundred years (i.e., from total isolation of prisoners, to putting them to work on farms and in shops). But such facts without appropriate relationship to the general political, economic and social conditions prevailing throughout america at successive stages of its development, will serve to hinder rather than inspire struggle; will serve to distort rather than clarify our thinking.

That we mean is, we cannot have, today, a complete, correct understanding of prisons and/or struggles in prisons in america, unless we pay proper attention to the presence and the struggles of Native Americans, of NewAfrika (hereinafter simply "Afrikans") in america. Which is to say that we must begin our analysis with the understanding that several nations exist on the north american continent; that america is a "prisonhouse of nations".

No correct understanding of prisons and struggles in prisons within the present u.s. borders can be had unless we begin by understanding that the development and function of the entire "criminal justice system" has been just as significantly determined by the struggles of oppressed nations as it has by the "needs and fears of the employers" as the "working class" rose in rebellion.

TO arrive at a definition and a shared conception of the "prison movement", it's necessary for us to know what a MOVEMENT is. For us, a "movement" is defined as: a particular instance or manner of moving; a particular tendency or particular trend in movement; a series of organized activities working toward a specific objective; an organized effort to promote or attain a specific end.

We made reference to the Soledad Brothers' defense activities because we think they serve to sufficiently mark the end of one period of struggle and the beginning of another; because we think that, together with the Attica Rebellion, they mark the point where a qualitative change occurred in the character of struggles in prisons within the u.s. borders.

That we mean is, while there have surely been "struggles in prisons since the 1800's," these struggles did not constitute a MOVEMENT; they did not represent a homogeneous, distinct, significant and influential phenomenon until the period marked by Soledad/Attica, and therefore did not constitute a "prison movement."

We give due recognition to all those struggles in prisons before 1970-71; to all those defense activities surrounding past prison struggles and/or individuals accused of opposing the law and order of the oppressor--but we maintain that none of these constituted a MOVEMENT and therefore did not constitute the "prison movement."

We give due recognition to the fact that many people within the u.s. borders, past and present, had/have a particular understanding of the role of prisons in american (capitalist/imperialist) society. But such an understanding is not a MOVEMENT.

There have been instances when struggles in prisons, prison conditions in general, and the defense activities surrounding persons accused of opposing the law and order of the oppressor have been used (either principally or opportunistically) as temporary issues in the political "careers" of groups and/or individuals. There have been articles, pamphlets and books written on prisons and prisoners, which gone toward enlightening people on prisons and generally raising political consciousness. But none of this constituted a MOVEMENT.

We also recognize that during the 1800's, the role of prisons and the struggles taking place in prisons had a very direct and intimate relationship to Afrikan people, and this relationship is fundamental to our definition of the "prison movement." But, again, we maintain that the "prison movement" did not come into being until the period marked by Soledad/Attica.

All of the "struggles in prisons since the 1800's" have, in one way or another, contributed to and influenced the present character and development of the "prison movement." They were actions which were quantitative in character...they were struggles which represent those quantitative changes which gradually accumulate and eventually result in qualitative change.

Thus, the "intensity" you refer to in your response did not merely rep-

resent continuous growth, as you seem to feel, but represented a discontinuous leap, development, and caused the transformation of "struggles in prisons since the 1800's" into the "prison movement."

Your response implies a mechanistic conception of struggle. It seems that you expect the struggles in prisons today to be the "same" as those of the past. Thus you deny or overlook "internal motion" and the possibility of new things arising. It's similar to saying that "all wars are the same," or that "all nationalism is reactionary"....

We can't forget, or ignore, the necessity for paying attention to new things, to things that are rising. We can't just concentrate on what has existed or on what exists at the present. We have to give due consideration to that which is coming into being. Reality is always concrete.

Therefore, when we begin to make a concrete analysis of prisons and struggles in prisons in america, we think we should investigate each separate struggle concretely. We should also check out the social, political and economic conditions prevailing throughout the country at successive periods. An analysis of this type would necessarily include a comparison of regions (i.e., struggles in northern prisons compared to those in southern prisons, and the particular conditions prevailing in both areas); it should also make special note of the national composition of prisons (i.e., the percentage of members of oppressed nations ((Native American nationals, Afrikan nationals, oppressor nation nationals)) in each prison and/or area).

Central to our position that a qualitative change took place in prison struggles at the period marked by Soledad/Attica is the fact that they are now intimately related to the liberation struggles of oppressed nations within the u.s. borders, particularly to the national liberation struggle of Afrikans in the u.s.

During (and since) the 1800's, while no prison MOVEMENT existed, there were struggles in prisons, and some attention was given to these struggles, to the role that prisons were then playing in the u.s. But, the attention given to these struggles, the interpretation of the role of prisons in the u.s.--what was given emphasis--usually depended upon who was making the analysis, why they were doing so, and at what point in time.

We've been made familiar with quotes from Mother Jones and Eugene Debs, for instance, which relate to prisons; we've been made familiar with material which emphasizes the "slave labor and slave wages" of prisoners, and which generally gives an economist perspective to prison and prison struggles. Such material tends to favor reform; if it approaches a revolutionary perspective, it does so from the perspective of the "dominant culture," i.e., revolutionaries of the oppressor nation.

But in the 1800's Afrikans in the u.s. were viewing prisons from a perspective which emphasized their national oppression. At that point in time, attention was naturally drawn to the South, since that's where most of us were, and where the prison system and the "criminal justice system" affected/effected us most.

For instance, in 1890, Afrikans proposed the formation of a National Afro-American League. Among the seven reasons given for the formation of the league was "The odious and demoralizing penitentiary system in the South, with its chain gangs, convict leases and indiscriminate mixing of males and females."

And, in 1901, DuBois was writing that "Despite compromise, war, and struggle, the (Afrikan) is not free. In well-nigh the whole rural South the Black farmers are peons, bound by law and custom to an economic slavery from which the only escape is death or the penitentiary."

We simply cite these to draw attention to some historical fact which must be considered by us today in making both general analysis/theory upon which we base our practice in national liberation struggle, and in making a particular analysis/theory upon which we base struggle in and around prisons in america.

In 1890 there was "indiscriminate mixing of males and females" in the prisons of the South; today, there is Comrade-Sister Assata Shakur in an all-male prison in New Jersey. Check it out.

Before 1863, the plantation was the "prison" for Afrikan people in the u.s. Whatever was happening in u.s. prisons before this point was, for all practical purposes, centered solely around the nationals of the oppressor nation.

After 1863, Afrikans began to "assume a new status" in america; we were no longer simply chattel, property--no longer simply "outside" of the oppressor nation--and thus found ourselves in the condition described by DuBois.

Thus, it was in the 1800's that struggles in and around american prisons began to change in character from any previous struggles. This change was not simply, not primarily caused by "the rise of the working class" etc., but by the change in the composition of prison populations, especially in the South. It was influenced by the changes taking place throughout america as the country "adjusted itself" to the new colonial status of Afrikans.

After 1863, the american "criminal justice system" began to assume a new role in the control not simply of the "working class", but in the control of oppressed nations. As more and more Afrikans began to fill southern prisons, the role/function of these prisons changed; southern prisons began to be looked upon differently and responded to differently than northern prisons. Consequently, struggles in prisons before the 1800's, during the 1800's, and after the 1800's, must be seen in accordance with the many variables surrounding each period.

We had a particular relationship to prisons in america during the 1800's, and prison struggles had a particular character during the 1800's. Our relationship to prisons in america during the 1800's was more or less restricted to those prisons in the South, where most of us were.

But we began to move from the South and into the North (and West). Thus, we began to assume a particular relationship to prisons in the North as well. And, as we began to fill northern (and western) prisons, prison struggles in general began to change. We're talking especially about the past 45 to 50 years.

To contend that the most notable changes in the nature of struggles in american prisons began to take place in the late sixties and early seventies, and that it was during this period that the prison MOVEMENT arose.

What began to distinguish the struggles in prisons during the sixties and seventies from those which preceded them, and thus gave rise to the "prison MOVEMENT" was the relationship that these new struggles had/have to national liberation struggles in general, and to the Afrikan liberation struggle in particular. We think that the years 1954 to 1970 had a unique influence upon struggles in prison, and thus contributed to giving the "prison movement" its distinct character.

Afrikan people in america have always comprised a nation, and our struggle has always been one aiming toward national liberation, independence, self-determination. If this fact has not always been clear to us and/or to others, it simply stands as evidence of our national oppression, of our lack of power to determine our own destiny, to define our own situation and goals.

We regard what is sometimes called the "black protest movement" or the "civil rights movement" as simply a particular expression, phase or stage of the national liberation struggle that we have been waging for several hundred years.

The years 1954 and 1955 are significant, since they serve to mark a distinctive stage of the struggle for national liberation. In these years seeds which had been planted centuries before, decades before, years and even days before, began to blossom. In these years also, seeds were planted as well.

In May, 1954, the u.s. supreme court declared "racial segregation" in u.s. public schools unconstitutional; this decision was followed in May, 1955, by an order to "integrate" u.s. public schools "with all deliberate speed."

Among other things, these acts forced a recognition of the continued existence of the national oppression of Afrikans in america. During the proceedings and as part of the legal argument before the court, it was stated that "slavery (national oppression) is perpetuated" by the laws requiring "separate but equal" public school facilities.

The decision and order by the court did not cease the perpetuation of "slavery" in america, which is to say that the national oppression of Afrikan people remained a reality.

But, just as the cause of the decision and order lay in the contradiction between the oppressed and oppressor nations, the supreme court action served to sharpen this contradiction, to heighten our consciousness and to escalate the level of national liberation struggle.

The Montgomery Bus Boycott of December, 1955: this, too, was a part of what went into marking this period as a distinctive stage of struggle. The Boycott arose as a consequence of national oppression, and it gave rise to new expressions of the fundamental contradiction within the u.s. borders: that between the oppressed Afrikan nation and the oppressor nation.

For the purpose of our analysis, we hold that it was the action taken by the u.s. supreme court and the Montgomery Bus Boycott that mark that period which gave rise to the "civil rights movement."

Again, this "civil rights movement" was simply one particular expression, one particular form that the national liberation struggle has assumed. And, even within this "civil rights movement" there are phases, or stages which can be distinguished.

But, taken as a whole, the "civil rights movement" gave rise to; and represented a new level of struggle; it represented and gave rise to a new level of consciousness. As this movement progressed, we began to see that this method, this means, was not entirely sufficient to meet our end, our objective, our need and desire. As we moved into the 60's we began to talk less about "civil rights" and more about "human rights"; less about "democratic rights" and "integration" and more about revolutionary nationalism.

(... thing) it necessary to note here that just soon might regard an on "nationalism" of revolutionary nationalists was in fact a RE-secession. El Nacionalista (Nacional X) was not the first nationalist, and the CNA was not the first body of Africans to lay claim to land in North America. The "nationalism" of the "civil rights movement" arose from internal success/failure, from the very nature of the relationship of Africans to America, i.e.: from the contradictory unity of imperialism and colonialism, and as a result of the contradictions within the very essence of this process.)

From its own experience we can recount the type of activity occurring in prisons in the middle and late sixties. Particularly at the opening of the sixties, the struggles in prisons in America differed little from those of the 1930's. To be more precise, these struggles at the beginning of the sixties were more similar, taken as a whole, to those struggles of the 1890's than they were to subsequent struggles--to those many struggles which took place within the context of the "prison movement."

As before, there were strikes of all sorts, work stoppages, petitions, riots; individual and relatively organized acts of resistance to racism, beatings, etc. Many of these received some coverage by the rulers' media; we have received support from the outside (legal, concerned community residents, family and friends of those prisoners involved, etc.).

But, more often than not, anything occurring in prisons at that point never became known beyond the walls. More often than not--what was characteristic of that stage--was that even if actions became known beyond the walls, it was simply a "new item"; there was the air of the "news" about prison strikes and riots; there was no permanent, organized body in the community (beyond a few lawyers or "prison reform groups") and few, if any, inside the walls.

... , as we say, these actions inside the walls were more "news" than anything else. This is not to say that they did not then represent clear political questions, in themselves. But it does say that, taken as a whole, movements themselves did not recognize or articulate such questions and were uncoordinated; the community, taken as a whole, didn't either. There was little coordination or articulation of the fact that strikes or riots in one prison could pose intimate, direct relationship with things happening in other prisons. There was no recognition or articulation of the fact that what was going on in any prison was related to things happening in the community. The men, for all practical purposes, no talk of prisons as being instruments of oppression and repression used by capitalist America. There was no talk, for all practical purposes, of those instruments being directed not only toward "national minorities" and used to prevent/destroy the coordinated struggle of these "minorities." In short, there was nothing approaching a "prison movement" in our meaning of the term.

By the years 1967, 1968, 1969, and as a more direct result of the "civil rights movement," a greater, more significant number of prisoners had been and were becoming politicized. It was also by 1967 that the transformation from "civil rights" to national liberation was becoming evident/distinct.

Between 1954 and 1967 many things had occurred, many things arose and faded, but exerted an influence. This influence was both external and internal: the student sit-ins and boycotts; the Little Rock formation of SNCC in 1960 and its more open "civil rights" to "black power"; the rise and fall of the Nation of Islam; the formation of the Revolutionary Action Movement; formation of the Black Panther Party;

the influence of people such as Malik, Eldridge, Robert Williams, Stokeley, Rap; there was the Bandung Conference in 1955; the independence of Ghana in 1957; the struggle and assassination of Lumumba in 1960-61; the struggles in Algeria, Cuba, etc., etc.

All of this began to show itself in a distinctive change in the character of prisoners and their struggles. As a result, there began to be seen prisoners leaving prisons in these years who became involved in the struggle on the street, but who also began to set up organizations of ex-prisoners to support prison struggles. We think 1970 the most proper date to be given to mark that point at which a distinct stage in "prison struggles" manifested itself, giving birth to the "prison movement."

The above facts, together with: the murders of W.L. Nolen, Cleveland Edwards and Alvin Miller on January 13, 1970; the execution of justice in the form of a pig thrown off a gallery on January 16, 1970; George Jackson, Fleeta Drumgo and John Clutchette being charged for this on February 28, 1970. Only by chance was one of these Brothers able to get a message out to his mother, who went to the B.P.P. It was due to the nature, the character, of the defense activities for the Soledad Brothers, which brought together all the features and influences we've mentioned above, and acted to give life to the "prison movement."

By their nature, the defense activities surrounding the Soledad Brothers served to reach out across the country and form a heretofore non-existing, concrete, conscious bond between prisoners. It was at this point that more--significantly more--prisoners and people outside began to form more organizations, inside and out. Definite, conscious, organized activity, on a mass, national scale, began to take place around prisons.

When people learned of the Soledad Brothers, they consequently learned not only of the contradictions in prisons, or in the "system of justice"; they also learned of the particular role that prisoners and ex-prisoners were and could play in the overall struggle--not as simple "prisoners," but as revolutionaries.

The activities surrounding the Soledad Brothers sparked a series of events which further served to cement this new stage: the Marin County Courthouse, August 7, 1970; George's assassination; the San Quentin Six; the trial of Ruchell Magee--and Attica, September, 1971.

Many subsequent prison struggles (especially the nature of these); defense and support activity around activists arrested and on trial; the attention that was subsequently given to these; the spread of the concepts of "political prisoners" and "prisoners of war"--we were able to become aware of these and view them with a particular perspective largely because of the process that the Soledad Brothers activity had set in motion.

Also, by this time (1970), that "civil rights movement" which had now become to us a more genuine movement toward national liberation was under heavy attack from the enemy. The number of prisoners of war had increased due to arrest, frame-up and railroading; armed actions were being carried out; there were underground formations; the number of political (politicized) prisoners had increased--there were more prisoners who had by now possessed a "revolutionary mentality." What began in 1970 was that the emphasis of prison struggles saw a change; the interests and objectives of prisoners changed; prison struggles ceased to be characterized as struggles for mere reform and became--consciously--part of the total revolutionary process.

II

STATEMENT

THE relationship existing between the "prison movement" and the overall struggle in America, the relationship existing between prisoners and people outside the walls, has been and will continue to be a dialectical relationship. This relationship has had several rather distinct phases or levels. That has heretofore characterized each of these phases or levels is the "control" and "direction" of outside people--even during those phases/levels when the influence was flowing from the prisons to the outside.

We're approaching (have approached) another level, where the influence again flows from the inside to the outside--only difference being that prisoners will be more involved in direction and control. This present phase/level will best be characterized by the impetus that prisoners will give to the formation of a national prisoners movement, a national revolutionary party, and a national revolutionary front.

RESPONSE

IN regards to the part where you state that a level is being approached where "direction" will be flowing from the inside/out, this can ONLY APPLY to the prison struggle, and then that too is minimal. Prisoners have a definite role within the context of the overall struggle and within the context of the struggle that is being waged inside the walls. However, it must be accepted that prisoners themselves cannot direct or control the struggle. They can influence greatly and can be very supportive. They can point out the many contradictions within the prison system, justice department, etc., which can be tied into the overall political/economic system as a whole by Comrades who are working in the communities. Real direction and control can only come from those who are in contact with the People on a day-to-day basis since we all know that it is the People who are the makers of history.

REPLY TO THE RESPONSE

WE think your response is evidence of: a misunderstanding of the statement; a misunderstanding or deliberate avoidance of the dialectic of the "prison movement"; a misunderstanding of the process and significance of contradiction in general, and of the particular contradictions involved in the "prison movement." Other things may be involved, but we'll begin with these three.

To aid us in our effort to make our position clear, we'll rely on Mao's ON CONTRADICTION, and suggest that the entire piece be studied.

MAO points out that the "law of contradiction in things, that is, the law of the unity of opposites, is the basic law of materialist dialectics," and that the "dialectical world outlook teaches us primarily how to observe and analyze the movement of opposites in different things and, on the basis of such analysis, to indicate the methods for resolving contradictions."

He begins by describing the universality of contradiction, although he notes that "the particularity of contradiction is still not clearly understood by many comrades, and especially by the dogmatists. They do not understand that it is precisely in the particularity of contradiction that the

universality of contradiction resides....The universality or absoluteness of contradiction has a two-fold meaning. One is that contradiction exists in the process of development of all things, and the other is that in the process of development of each thing a movement of opposites exists from beginning to end." He further points out that these opposites in movement, or, these "two aspects" are at once in conflict and interdependence, and constitute the totality of a thing.

He further notes that each contradiction has its particularity, and that it is especially important "to observe what is particular to this form of motion of matter, namely, to observe the qualitative difference between this form of motion and other forms," because this constitutes the foundation of our knowledge of a thing.

Not only must we study the particular contradiction of every system, of the forms of motion of matter, but also to study the particular contradiction of each process in the system's course of development.

But, "In order to reveal the particularity of the contradiction...it is necessary to reveal the particularity of the two aspects of each of the contradictions in that process; otherwise it will be impossible to discover the essence of the process." "The two aspects of each contradiction cannot be treated in the same way since each aspect has its own characteristics."

"Then we speak of understanding each aspect of a contradiction, we mean understanding what specific position each aspect occupies, what concrete forms it assumes in its interdependence and in its contradiction with its opposite, and what concrete methods are employed in the struggle with its opposite, when the two are both interdependent and in contradiction, and also after the interdependence breaks down."

"...each stage in the process has its particular features to which we must give attention too....in a lengthy process the conditions usually differ at each stage. The reason is that, although the nature of the fundamental contradiction in the process of development of a thing and the essence of the process remain unchanged, the fundamental contradiction becomes more and more intensified as it passes from one stage to another in the lengthy process. In addition, among the numerous major and minor contradictions which are determined or influenced by the fundamental contradiction, some become intensified, some are temporarily or partially resolved or mitigated, and some new ones emerge; hence the process is marked off into stages. If people do not pay attention to the stages in the process of development of a thing, they cannot deal with its contradictions properly."

Further on, Mao deals with the principal contradiction and the principal aspect of a contradiction.

The principal contradiction is that "whose existence and development determine or influence the existence and development of the other contradictions." Also, as to the principal aspect: "...in any given contradiction, either principal or secondary...the development of the contradictory aspects is uneven. Sometimes they seem to be in equilibrium, which is however only temporary and relative, while unevenness is basic. Of the two contradictory aspects, one must be principal and the other secondary. The principal aspect is the one playing the leading role in the contradiction. The nature of a thing is determined mainly by the principal aspect of a contradiction, the aspect which has gained the dominant position.

"At this situation is not static; the principal and the non-principal aspects of a contradiction transform themselves into each other and the nature of the thing changes accordingly. In a given process or at a given

stage in the development of a contradiction, "A" is the principal aspect and "B" is the non-principal aspect; at another stage or in another process the roles are reversed--a change determined by the extent of the increase or decrease in the force of each aspect in its struggle against the other in the course of the development of a thing....When the principal aspect which has gained predominance changes, the nature of a thing changes accordingly."

"Some people think that this is not true of certain contradictions...and there is no change in their respective positions. This is the mechanical materialist conception, not the dialectical materialist conception. True, the productive forces, practice and the economic base generally play the principal and decisive role...But it must also be admitted that in certain conditions, such aspects as the relations of production, theory and the superstructure in turn manifest themselves in the principal and decisive role. The creation and advocacy of revolutionary theory plays the principal and decisive role in those times of which Lenin said, 'Without revolutionary theory there can be no revolutionary movement.' When a task, no matter which, has to be performed, but there is as yet no guiding line, method, plan or policy, the principal and decisive thing is to decide on a guiding line, method, plan or policy."

We don't think it's necessary to go into Identity, Struggle and Antagonism.

The "prison movement" represents one of the many contradictions in America. But the movement also has its own contradictions, its own principal and secondary contradictions; each of these contradictions have their own opposing aspects, one aspect within each contradiction being primary, the other aspect within each being secondary. Each of the problems Mao dealt with in his study of the law of contradiction (the universality, particularity, principal contradiction and principal aspect, etc.) are found in the "prison movement."

Since contradiction is inherent in the "prison movement," any/all of the many contradictions within the "prison movement" maintain their separate aspects and the power of self-movement. It is this self-movement which accounts for the ability of these aspects to reverse their positions.

Consequently, if we have a contradiction within the "prison movement" represented by the "inside" and the "outside", it stands that one of these aspects will be the principal one, and the other the non-principal one.

"But this situation is not static...." In a given process or at a given stage in the development of a contradiction, the roles are reversed. This reversal is "determined by the extent of the increase or decrease in the force of each aspect in its struggle against the other....When the principal aspect which has gained predominance changes, the nature of a thing changes accordingly."

In other words, if outside forces represented the principal aspect and exercised real direction and control, their position is not static. Given certain conditions, at a given stage in the development of the contradiction, they become the non-principal aspect. The reversal is determined by, say, an increase in the force of prisoners and a decrease in the force of those outside the walls. Once the inside forces become the principal aspect, the nature of the contradiction, the nature of the "prison movement" changes accordingly.

To have asserted that the "prison movement" is qualitatively different from the "movement/struggle in prisons since the 1800's." But what is of equal

significance is the changes which have taken place within the "prison movement" itself.

Just as "movement/struggle in prisons since the 1800's" represent quantitative changes which contributed to the qualitative change that we call the "prison movement," in the same way, quantitative changes occurring within the "prison movement" are bringing about new contradictions, new levels, new stages, changes in the nature of the "prison movement" and of the contradictions within it.

The "prison movement" began to do more than simply point up contradictions in prison/the "system of justice"; it began to do more than point up the economic basis of "crime". It began to do more than point up the contradictions in "capitalist" society and the role of prisons in such societies.

As the contradictions between america and its oppressed nations sharpened, these contradictions became central to the initial formation and development of the "prison movement." Beyond merely pointing up contradictions inherent in "social production and private appropriation" and beyond showing prisons as "instruments of control and intimidation for those who challenge this system"--beyond all this, the "prison movement" began to point up and aggressively involve itself in all aspects of the contradiction between america and the developing revolutionary national liberation struggles within it.

Not only was the "prison movement" influenced by this "external" development (national liberation struggle/consciousness) but it was a part of it, and it exerted its own influence upon the developing national liberation struggles. Prisoners and struggles in prisons contributed to the formulation and dissemination of a consciousness and a theory of national oppression and consequently became a part of the struggle to end this oppression.

What we mean to say is that as the "prison movement" developed, the "inside" did not remain static, did not remain the non-principal aspect in its struggle with its opposite (the outside). To deny the possibility of this is to abandon dialectical materialism; to deny its actuality is to evidence dogmatism, chauvinism, opportunism, or a combination of all three. Further, it's to evidence the "increase and decrease in the force of each aspect"--namely, the decrease in the ability of the outside to, at this stage, remove the obstruction blocking the further development of the contradictions, thereby pointing up what has made--at this stage--the reversal of the role of these aspects possible and necessary. It further points up the nature of the present contradiction, i.e., the function or role of the present principal aspect (inside) at this stage, i.e., the creation and advocacy of revolutionary theory, which will lead to revolutionary practice.

"If the universe is an interrelated changing process, we recognize it in parts by separating out, in thought, certain partial processes--aspects such, for example, as society, the means of production, changing objects, words. These we call Isolates. An isolate is something that has been dragged from its environment in space, time, and matter. By itself, therefore, it is a fiction, for dialectically nothing can be free of environment; but it is a real fiction in the sense that it really does have an objective existence. The first step in the study of the dialectic is to chip out its isolate, to study them, and then to remake the dialectic by seeing them again in their environment." (H. Levy, Aspects of Dialectical Materialism, quoted in Lectures on Marxist Philosophy by David Guest.)

This is what happens in all analysis, evidenced, for instance, in studying the law of contradiction. It was quoted so as to serve as a point of departure.

To say that a thing has contradiction is to say that it has a dialectic, and vice versa. It was with this understanding that we stated "The relationship existing between the 'prison movement' and the overall struggle in America, the relationship existing between prisoners and people outside the walls, has been and will continue to be a dialectical relationship. This relationship has had several rather distinct phases or levels. What has heretofore characterized each of these phases or levels is the 'control' and 'direction' of outside people--even during those phases/levels when the influence was flowing from the prisons to the outside."

Enough of what's been said up to this point should serve to bring understanding of the meaning of the above paragraph. For example, the "civil rights movement" during one phase/level exerted influence upon prisoners; this "external" influence was felt, came to be utilized by prisoners together with internal dialectic, resulting in the exertion of an influence flowing from prisons to the outside (i.e., exposure of prison conditions). With such things as support/defense activities, formation of outside groups, awareness of activities in other prisons, the flow of literature into prisons, etc., more prisoners became politicized, there was more organized, conscious resistance, prisoners began to come together into study groups, collectives; chapters of the Nation of Islam and the B.P.P. were formed in prisons; some of the most advanced ideological thought and programmatic proposals have issued from inside prisons.

But, to one extent or another, prisoners have never been able to sufficiently determine the direction of their influence, their contributions. It has been left with the outside element to determine what was of value, how it would be used, how far certain ideas or certain practical steps would be taken. There were instances where outside forces not only lacked the willingness to adopt and effect certain elements of thought, certain programs; but there has also been a tendency, a failure to grasp the significance and necessity of certain positions and programs.

To this must be added a certain decrease in the ranks of revolutionaries on the outside, a decrease measured not only in the numbers of active people, but measured also by the decrease in the number of "active" people who are still struggling to bring about revolutionary change and not mere reform. Many "active" people have found for themselves comfortable positions, many times gaining these comfortable positions at the expense of prisoners. Many folks have become so concerned with the "survival" of themselves and the groups to which they belong that their vision has been hampered, their growth has been retarded. Because of the "needs of (economic) survival", the benefits and comforts and distractions of life on the street, many circumstances abound which create confusion, hinder movement towards goals which break the routine and cause people to be placed in the path of the enemy in ways which jeopardize "freedom" and health.

In "Toward The United Front," Comrade-Brother George Jackson noted "the new unitarian and progressive current" which had sprung up around political prisoners and asked how this could be developed and employed in the overall struggle.

"The 'Prison Movement,' the August 7th movement and all similar efforts educate the people in the illegitimacy of establishment power and hint at the ultimate goal of revolutionary consciousness at every level of struggle. The goal is always the same: the creation of an infrastructure capable of fielding a people's army.

"With this as a common major goal, it would seem that anti-establishment forces would find little difficulty in developing common initiatives and methods consistent with the goals of mass society. Regretfully, this has not been the case. Only the prison movement has shown any promise of cutting across the ideological, racial and cultural barricades that have blocked the natural coalition of left-wing forces at all times in the past. So this movement must be used to provide an example. The issues involved and the dialectic which flows from an understanding of the clear objective existence of overt oppression could be the springboard for our entry into the tide of increasing world-wide socialist consciousness."

George was pointing here to a need, a necessity, brought about by the overall conditions of struggle. He was pointing to "barricades" blocking not simply the advancement of "prison struggles," but which prevented the advancement of the overall struggle in America.

For a number of reasons, outside forces were not able to engage themselves in various types of actions necessary for the further development of struggle. George rightly believed that the "prison movement" could provide an example, provide the impetus for such development.

He was not calling for the "prison movement" to merely "point up contradictions in prison"; not merely calling for it to "point up contradictions in the 'system of justice'."

He was calling upon the "prison movement" to "begin to break the old behavioral patterns that have repeatedly allowed bourgeois capitalism, its imperialism and fascism, to triumph over the last several decades." Further, and most important, he was calling upon the "prison movement" to play a specific role in "the creation of an infrastructure capable of fielding a people's army," and asking that this be done under "disciplined and principled leadership..." One simply cannot act without a head."

But where was this "head" to be found, if not in the "prison movement" itself?

Subsequent developments have shown that, if this "head" is to be found within the "prison movement," then it will, further, be found in the prison, as represented by prisoners, rather than those outside the walls--at this particular stage.

To understand, for instance, that those behind the walls have limited mobility, that they don't have "day-to-day" contact with the people.

But it's not this daily contact with the people alone that's needed, at this stage. Those "anti-establishment forces" George spoke of had/have this daily contact--but the barricades remain!!!

What's needed are 'particular responses from the nervous systems' of the people; this contact; what's needed is/are particular forms of practice, not just particular theory.

In understanding of the reason underlying the call for the national liberation movement, the proposed party of liberation front, to state that it has specific proposals, by specific people, aimed toward a specific objective. It stands that these can't be simply thrown out as the long

that come on - will grab them, begin to write their realities, and do this in specific ways--ways which would give them assurance that these proposals would fulfill their purpose.

Atiba
Fakih
S P O

But where was this "head" to be found, if not in the "prison movement" itself?

Subsequent developments have shown that, if this "head" is to be found within the "prison movement," then it will, further, be found in the prisons among/represented by prisoners, rather than those outside the walls--at this particular stage.

We understand, for instance, that those behind the walls have limited mobility, that they don't have "day-to-day" contact with the people.

But it's not this daily contact with the people alone that's needed, at this stage. Those "anti-establishment forces" George spoke of had/have this daily contact--but the barricades remain!!!

What's needed are 'particular responses from the nervous systems' of those having this contact; what's needed is/are particular forms of practice, guided by particular theory.

Our understanding of the reasons underlying the call for the national prisoners movement, the proposed party and liberation front, indicate that these are specific proposals, made by specific people, aiming toward a specific objective. It stands that these can't be simply thrown out in the hope that someone will grab them, begin to make them realities, and do this in specific ways--ways which would give some assurance that these proposals would fulfill their purpose.

Atiba
Fakih
S P O