

Prisoners Solidarity Committee

NEWSLETTER No. 3

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Sharean of
Auburn 6
describes
Attica terror

see centerfold

Why we say . . .

Tear the prisons down!

by TOM SOTO

The following article was written by Tom Soto of the Prisoners Solidarity Committee. Tom was in Attica during the rebellion as a representative of the PSC at the prisoners' request. Since that time he has written and spoken extensively on the events at Attica (see PSC newsletters 1 and 2). The article below expresses the position of the Prisoners Solidarity Committee on prisons, political prisoners and the whole question of the U.S. system of concentration camps for the poor and oppressed.

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Prisons are concentration camps for the workers and oppressed peoples. What does this mean? And how do we draw such a conclusion?

First of all, let us investigate the class and national character of the prisons. It is common knowledge that 99 percent of all those incarcerated are poor, working class people; less than 1 percent are rich. Second, 85 percent of all the prisoners in American jails are non-white peoples—Black, Puerto Rican, Chicano, etc. Why is there such a stupendous imbalance with respect to the racial (national) composition of the prisons? This is so because within the confines of what are called the "United States" there does not exist "one nation, under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all," but there exist several nations.

It is an objective deducible fact that there exists within the U.S. a privileged white oppressor nation dominated by the rich capitalist ruling class through its exclusive organization, the state apparatus (federal, state, and city governments). In addition, there are several oppressed nations and national minorities—the Black nation, the Chicano nation, the Puerto Rican nation, and others.

These oppressed nations in actuality are internal colonies of the imperialist system which also super-exploits the South Vietnamese, the Dominican, the Congo Kinshasa peoples and generally the people of Asia, Africa, and Latin America who are under the yoke of imperialism. Of course the workers within the imperialist white nation are also exploited and oppressed, but not with the same degree of intensity, and certainly the people of the white community are not faced with fascist, racist terror as a normal way of life.

In addition, it would be objectively incorrect to conclude that every white person oppresses every non-white person. What objective conditions show is that the workers of all nationalities, which include the oppressed peoples (oppressed nations), are all exploited by the banks, corporations, bosses, landlords, and factory farms, that is, the capitalist ruling class. The instrument or organization which they use to enforce and legalize their exploitation of the poor is the government.

At their disposal they have a fascist, frame-up, kangaroo court system and bodies of armed men (the police and military) to terrorize and eliminate those who would oppose their "law and order." Therefore, when we analyze the nature and character of the prisons, we must first take note of whose prisons they are.

Are they the prisons of the workers? Are they the prisons of the oppressed peoples? Certainly not! They are the prisons of the rich, the capitalist class.

We live under an economic system that from its inception, two hundred years ago, has never provided full and equal employment! There has always been and will always be under this present system (capitalism) large masses of people with no means of livelihood.

The reason for this is that in order for the bosses to maintain and increase their level of profit, which they make from exploiting the working people, they must keep the wages of the workers as low as possible.



(Continued on PSC-3)



Attica ex-inmate explains rebellion

"We knew we were right"

The following is an extensive excerpt of an interview with Tom W., who was an inmate at Attica for almost two years. He is currently out on parole.

PSC: Attica is over 85 percent Black and Puerto Rican. Can you describe the conditions or racism they live under?

Tom: Look at some of the jobs inside the prison and look at the jobs out front where it's clean. Like clerk jobs, where you're around visitors, not just prisoners' relatives, where you'd be noticed. None of these jobs are given to Blacks; they're all for whites who have money, and own their own white shirts and pressed pants. People who can't afford their own clothing to look half-way presentable, are given the metal shop jobs. Ninety percent of the men working there are Black and Puerto Rican.

Everything in the yard is segregated, because the hacks want it that way. They want conflict among the inmates, to keep inmates at each other's throats, so they won't get together. But recently the inmates have been coming together, holding classes, finding out why they're in prison, and becoming politically conscious.

PSC: Could you explain how this consciousness is developing?

Tom: They're becoming aware of the way they're made to work in these mills, getting only a dime a day, while the state is making millions off their labor.

PSC: You were in the cell next to Sam Melville. What was he like?

Tom: Sam was a great guy. He was treated bad for his political thoughts and because of what he was in for. They tried to keep him segregated from everyone else, by putting him in keep-lock. They'd get him for refusing to work because his hands were crippled, but they wouldn't do anything for him. They'd lock him up for having books in his cell, even books that had gone through censors.

PSC: How did you and the other prisoners know about the Prisoners Solidarity Committee?

Tom: Sam had informed us of the PSC and of other groups who were fighting outside for us. We were lucky one day to catch part of a program on the radio with members of the PSC. A great number of guys in the place heard it and that's all they talked about during lunch. Some of them couldn't believe it. They didn't know what it meant, so they'd

come and ask some of us. It wasn't long after that groups started forming.

In the yard we'd have educationals. A couple of guys were teaching law. There was a food collective, where guys would put money together to get food. If someone got locked up, we'd protect him after he got locked up. We showed a lot of love for our brothers. We started our own library, of books guys had sent out for, so we didn't have to use the prison library.

PSC: How did the racist murder of George Jackson affect everybody?

Tom: When we found out that George Jackson was murdered, we knew that he died for fighting back—for no other reason. He was spotted out, just like Sam Melville, and got gunned down. He was fighting; he was right; and they knew he was right. When he was accused of killing this cop in the prison—the state had no case—the defendant had a good case, that the state knew—so they exterminated him—we knew that guards are paid off to murder prisoners that they want to get rid of.

We knew that George Jackson was murdered; we knew it for the simple reason that we lived in the same kind of environment he did. I know there's nobody who would take a chance of busting out—maybe sneak out on a truck or something but as far as trying to shoot your way out—there's no way to do it. The hacks on the towers have machine guns. It was one big conspiracy to gun him down. There were deep feelings about this in Attica, among everybody—whites, Blacks, and Puerto Ricans. They wanted to hear the truth on the radio.

PSC: What action did the prisoners take around George Jackson's death?

Tom: We got together to show our support for what George Jackson was fighting for. We knew he was fighting for the freedom of all prisoners, justice in the courts, and the feelings were strong. We had a day that we selected in his memory, where we went into the mess hall and had a peaceful demonstration. Everyone was quiet, there was complete quiet, and they didn't pick up any food. About 95 percent of the group, from the whole prison population went down with us.

PSC: What led up to the rebellion at Attica?

Tom: Naturally, the prison conditions by themselves were enough to cause a war, if not a rebellion. We were in the process of going through the courts, with a petition and a manifesto of demands. Everything was turned

Sharean of Auburn 6 reveals Attica terror

Following is an interview with Sharean Justice Tel-star hiem. Sharean is one of the Auburn 6, a group of six Black prisoners who were framed up after the rebellion at Auburn prison last November 4. After spending several months in the special housing unit at Auburn and in segregation, Sharean was transferred to Attica and was there during the uprising in September. He was recently bailed out by the Prisoners Solidarity Committee after having spent five years in New York's concentration camp system.

PSC: When did you first become aware of the Prisoners Solidarity Committee?

SHAREAN: The second time I went to court was the first time I found out about the Prisoners Solidarity Committee. They were demonstrating outside of the courtroom. When they (the guards) brought us around in a van, I saw the red banners—it was totally beautiful. It just made me feel stronger. I felt like I was just obligated to support our supporters.

What really made it beautiful to me was how the comrades spoke out in court when the judge denied us due process of law. The PSC comrades would get up and tell the judge, "This is wrong: why don't you disqualify yourself," etc. I have never had an experience like that before. I figured I would go to court and be railroaded. But this really inspired me. It was so important to know the comrades were behind us in that remote area. (Auburn prison is in a small town in upstate New York—ed.)

PSC: You were brutally beaten and teargassed in Auburn after the PSC brought a busload of relatives to visit last April. Could you tell us about that?



PSC demonstrating in Auburn showtorn for prisoners.

down, and we weren't even accepted in these courts because of our backgrounds, etc. We knew we couldn't win, but we just kept fighting. A lot of our papers, etc., were being torn up and thrown away—they never got to their destinations. Letters to governors, assemblies, and senators—weren't even leaving the joint—they were being thrown away.

One man who talked to a newspaper reporter was locked up in his cell for 30 days. This man was sentenced to life—and will probably spend the rest of his life in prison. He knows that he has to fight for change, because he has to live in that place. When work stoppages happened in the metal shop, they'd pick out 10 or 20 guys and ship them down to another place. The reason I think it happened now—an all out rebellion—was that the guys in there knew we were being backed—and we knew we were right.

SHAREAN: On April 18, the pig came over to my cell and said I had a visitor. I got dressed and went down to see my two sisters. I told them that the pigs had only given us one hour and I didn't agree with that because I hadn't seen my sisters in quite a long time. So (when the time was up) I went out to speak to the lieutenant. I explained to him that I hadn't seen my sisters in years and that I would like a little more time. He said, Lewis (Sharean's slave name is Michael Lewis—ed.), we can't do anything about it. I told him I wasn't going to leave. He said, "Lewis, visiting hours are up."

So I said I wanted to say good-bye to my sisters. As I turned this lieutenant grabbed me around the neck and they had about 15 officers grab me and throw me on the ground. They put shackles on my ankles, a restraining belt and handcuffs and they began punching and kicking me. As this was going on they were saying, "Why don't you report this to the federal judge?" (The Auburn 6 were suing the guards for brutality in federal court—ed.) Then they carried me up to segregation; they maced me, punched me, and threw me in a cell. About two hours later they took me back to my regular cell. I told them I wasn't going to lock in until I saw the warden and got an explanation of why I wasn't able to have a decent visit with my sister.

TEARGASSED FOR 17 HOURS

They said, "Lewis, if you don't lock in we have ways of putting you in there." Then the sergeant opened up the gate in back of segregation and threw a tear gas grenade in. It exploded. I tried to get the first one he threw. The second one he threw I grabbed to throw down the

toilet, but it exploded in my face. The gas was so vicious I had to run into my cell to get away from the smoke. Then they threw a grenade through my ventilator so the tear gas was coming from both sides and there was no place I could go. I had a towel around my face but I could hardly breathe. I tried to holler out and ask the other brothers how they were, but I couldn't say anything. I laid there and laid there on the floor for 17 hours. I believe their intention was to kill me.

PSC: Would you describe what it was like in Attica during the rebellion?

SHAREAN: Well, I was taking a shower one day. It was September 9. All of a sudden, I heard the escape whistle blowing, so I figured somebody made a dash for liberation. As time went on, I found out that the inmates had seized the majority of the concentration camp. And I said "Right on!" to that! The pigs cut off the radio so that in segregation we couldn't get news of the rebellion. They just played continuous music.

On the morning of the 13th, I was watching out my window and saw about 200 state troopers going around the bend in back of segregation. They had shotguns across their chests and they were laughing and joking. I assumed they had already gotten the order to storm the prison. I guess they were just overjoyed at the opportunity to shoot the people down. About five minutes later, I heard a National Guard helicopter start warming up its motor outside the wall.

About five minutes later the helicopter left the ground and began to circle. Then I didn't see it any more. But I assumed it went down to D Block. Then I heard a lot of gunfire and I could hear very clearly another helicopter announcing, "Surrender with your hands over your head, you will not be harmed," over and over. (I heard later on that at that time they were just beating people to death while they were saying, "you will not be harmed.")

WITNESSED ATTICA BEATINGS

A little while after that, I heard that they were going to bring inmates up to segregation. The guys had to walk from D Block all the way over to the receiving center (which is segregation) in the nude. The pigs all grabbed their sticks and lined up on the stairwell leading up to segregation. I heard the first individual they brought up hollering and I heard a lot of sticks coming into contact with the body. I found it somewhat hard to control the impulses of my emotions.

I could hear the pigs downstairs say "run." Then the inmate had to run up the stairs with their hands behind their head, in the nude. And the police would start beating them. They would knock them down the stairs and the brothers would have to get up and go right through it again. I heard the pigs say, "Come on, nigger, get up there, get up there." It was intensifying. The pigs were totally savage. All that day I heard them bringing inmates up. "We got another one coming," they would yell and all line up. When

who might otherwise refuse.) In this way, the bosses keep the wages of all workers down, because they can always replace a worker who demands too much with a worker who will take much less because he or she is starving. What this in effect does is to pit one worker against another worker, dividing them, and further intensifying the exploitation of all workers, employed and unemployed.

The same tactic, to divide and conquer, is used by the bosses to divide the workers of the oppressor and the oppressed nations. The ruling capitalist class being white, hires proportionally more white workers than non-white workers. (Non-whites have double and triple the unemployment rate of whites.) In addition, the white workers are paid more than the non-white workers for the same jobs. This objectively has the effect of first, dividing the workers on the basis of nationality, and second, increasing the profits of the bosses by super-exploiting the workers



SHAREAN JUSTICE TEL-STAR HIEM

they finally began to bring the inmates into the north side, where I was, I could see the brothers as they went past my cell.

I recognized the voices of a few comrades I knew hollering, "Stop, you're killing me." And the pig would say "You're not dead yet!" They would say, "Black is beautiful, especially when blood is running out of it!"

At this time they brought an inmate down whose hand was hanging off. He also had shotgun pellets in his eye. He was laying on the floor of his cell; I could see blood dripping out of his cell next to mine. He told me he was shot but didn't want to go to the hospital. "They're gonna kill me on the way and say that I died from these wounds." I said, "You're losing a lot of blood, brother. Your best bet is to go to the hospital." He said, "I realize that brother, but I know they're gonna kill me on the way. I don't mind dying for the cause, man, but I don't want to die when I can't defend myself."

He finally agree to go. I called the pigs, but before they took him away I said, "Listen, I remember your face, your face, your face, I remember everybody's face here. This man is not critically wounded. He's not gonna die. I want you to get him to the hospital safely. I am a witness that the man is living and I get out in September—you know what I mean." I don't know what happened to the brother, but I listened to the radio and at that time I didn't hear that he had died.

THE STRUGGLE INTENSIFYING

PSC: How do you think the prisoners feel about the rebellion now?

SHAREAN: The brothers don't regret what happened. They regretted that a lot of comrades were assassinated, but they did not regret the education that the uprising gave the people on the outside. It showed the people how the fascist system is, what Rockefeller or any branch of the government would do in cases like this. I believe the people learned a whole lot from the Attica rebellion. And I sincerely believe that the Attica rebellion will definitely intensify the struggle in the concentration camps everywhere.

Finally, I'd just like to say, right on to the struggle. Freedom will be ours in the very near future. And I will be doing everything in my power to see to it.

Power to the people!

..... of the oppressed nations!

The masses of unemployed, who consist of the Black, Puerto Rican, Chicano, and poor white peoples, are forced because of their ongoing poverty to commit crimes of survival. We do not support or condone robbery, muggings, blackmail, fraud, prostitution, or any other anti-social acts, but we know that if every man and woman had an education and a job with pay sufficient to meet the material needs of food, clothing, and shelter, there would be no basis for crimes and all people could be productive members of society. Therefore, the bulk of those incarcerated in the jails of the capitalist class were forced to commit their so-called crimes. They are in effect prisoners of a political system which does not offer them any legal way to survive. That is why we say that all prisoners are political prisoners.

(Continued on PSC-4)

-Tear the prisons down

(Continued from PSC-1)

To do this, the capitalists deliberately create a large labor force of unemployed workers. There are millions of people available to work, who can't find jobs for the simple fact that there aren't any. Because of their extreme poverty, they will work for the lowest salaries when an opening finally turns up. (Through work-for-welfare programs, the state is now forcing workers to take sub-standard wages

Help the PSC help the prisoners

Tel. 989-3932

The Prisoners Solidarity Committee is urgently in need of funds, both for our continued support of all prisoners and for the Relatives' Transportation Fund. Please send donations to: Prisoners Solidarity Committee, 58 West 25 St., NYC.

Anyone wishing to help in the work of the PSC should also contact us at the following chapters:

BUFFALO, NEW YORK
939 Main Street (716) 882-1112

ROCHESTER, NEW YORK
69 Rohr Street

NEW ORLEANS, LOUISIANA
1024 Jackson Street

SYRACUSE, NEW YORK
120 Dell Street (315) 474-5551

BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS
P.O. Box 8875 (617) 661-0345

CLEVELAND, OHIO
Box 2576, East Cleveland (216) 231-8456

DETROIT, MICHIGAN
2515 Woodward (313) 962-4979

MILWAUKEE, WISCONSIN
150 E. Juneau Avenue (414) 273-8089

WILMINGTON, DELAWARE
P.O. Box 972 (302) 656-8451

What the PSC does

by JOHN DIAZ

After the Auburn Prison rebellion last November 4, many of the brothers who were being held in segregation as punishment for the rebellion there wrote scores of letters to a lot of different organizations asking for help in exposing the brutal, inhuman treatment they were receiving, and requesting support for the struggle they were waging against the fascist prison system. Youth Against War & Fascism was the only organization that responded to the brothers' cries for help. Recognizing the need for a special group to work around the question of prisons, we formed the Prisoners Solidarity Committee, which includes prisoners and their relatives and has branches in many cities around the country.

Since its formation, the PSC has helped a great many people in a lot of different ways, and continues to do so today. For example, we help with legal aid; we send packages to the prisoners whenever we can; through lawyers we stay in contact with those incarcerated in concentration camps throughout the country; we keep the brothers and sisters informed on what's happening on the outside; we send them literature whenever possible; we mobilize people to show support for them when they go to court; we organize protests and demonstrations against the brutal, repressive and oppressive penal system; we try to mobilize support for the demands they make and the rights they are supposed to have; we help them get jobs when they are released; we raise funds for bail; and we provide transportation so that their relatives can visit them.

Our activities began around the case of the Auburn 6. These six brothers were picked out and charged with being the leaders of the rebellion at Auburn Concentration Camp. The racist authori-

ties have been trying to use these brothers as examples of what they'll do to the other prisoners if they don't stay in their place. Two of these brothers recently became eligible for bail and thanks to the untiring efforts of the Prisoners Solidarity Committee, Hassan and Sharean are now out on bail.

TRANSPORTATION FUND

Since last winter, when we mobilized hundreds of people to demonstrate, time after time, in Auburn, N.Y., for the prisoners, our activities have become known to prisoners throughout the state and in many parts of the country. And when the Attica uprising occurred, the prisoners requested that the PSC be there to speak in their behalf.

One of the most pressing problems for prisoners and their families is the problem of relatives getting to see their loved ones in the prisons. For this reason, the PSC has made transportation for relatives to various prisons one of its primary activities. Many relatives are not able to see their loved ones for months and sometimes years at a time because they are too poor to make the long trip.

The fact is that the ruling class in this country has deliberately built the so-called prisons (which are nothing more than concentration camps for the poor) far from the populated areas. This is done in order to isolate the struggling brothers and sisters, who are prisoners in this society because of circumstances forced upon them by the capitalist system of oppression and exploitation.

The Prisoners Solidarity Committee not only unconditionally supported the demands of the brothers in Auburn and Attica, but at the same time we raised money to charter buses to take relatives to see their loved ones. Immediately after the Attica massacre, when many relatives did not know if their people were dead or alive, the PSC took a busload of relatives to the prison. At times when we don't have enough money to charter a bus (which costs between \$450 and \$500), we use our own cars for transportation.

The problem of transportation for relatives is particularly pressing because all the brothers and sisters confined in these concentration camps are poor. Their families don't even have the money to supply them with proper legal aid, nor to send them packages, let alone visit them hundreds of miles away. And when they somehow do manage to visit, the people face the racist harassment of the prison officials, who make them wait hours before the prisoner is brought down—if he or she is brought down at all.

I have experienced all of these hassles myself because my father recently got out of prison after spending nine years of his life incarcerated. During those nine long years, I think I visited him

less than eight times and, needless to say, it wasn't because I didn't want to. But I have also seen this terrible harassment of relatives on many trips organized by the PSC. Yet, in spite of all the hassles, the prison officials can't take away the happiness felt in a mother's heart to be able to see her son, or in a wife's heart to be able to see her husband, after not being able to see them for months, or sometimes years. It really made me feel good to see how happy the relatives are to be able to visit their loved ones.

Thanks to the many friends who have donated funds, the Prisoners Solidarity Committee has been able to take relatives to Attica, Auburn, Comstock, and Green Haven prisons. Another trip to Attica is now being planned for the first week in November. A chartered bus to Clinton is also being planned for some time late in November.

There are brothers and sisters incarcerated in the concentration camps who need help in so many ways. The Prisoners Solidarity Committee will try to aid them and their families in every way possible. As long as these so-called prisons exist, the PSC will be around to help the poor people incarcerated, and eventually the PSC will be instrumental in either tearing down these prisons, or using them to incarcerate the real criminals in this society.



Relatives of Auburn prisoners.

-Tear the prisons down

(Continued from PSC-3)

If the poor, by their material needs, are forced to commit "crimes" to survive, should they be tried by the same capitalist parasites who force them to commit "crimes" to begin with? Do the bosses have the right to put the workers on trial? Does the ruling capitalist class have the right to try the poor for rebelling against exploitation and injustice? Does the oppressor have the right to try the oppressed? Certainly not!!! Then what is the solution to the so-called problem of the prisons?

Is the solution to incarcerate the poor, throw them into concentration camps, to be beaten,

gassed, maced, forced to work at 25 cents a day, execute them as they did in Attica, Dade County, or San Quentin? Is the answer to put them in the box (solitary confinement), suspend their visiting privileges, raise their commissary prices (in those prisons where there are commissaries), transfer them to "institutions for the criminally insane" like Dannemora State Hospital, the worst of all concentration camps in New York State? The answer again is no!

There is only one solution, and that is to tear the prisons down, and free all the brothers and sisters from the hands of the greedy rich and their fascist stooges!! We say, the workers and oppressed people are the only ones who have the right and capability to truly rehabilitate the so-called criminals. The capitalist class, the oppressor nation has no right to try anyone. On the contrary, it is the working people who will ultimately try these parasites!! If we were to take the position of other political tendencies, such as the so-called Communist Party, that only certain

prisoners who are in jail solely for their political activities should be released, then in effect we would be saying that the Rockefellers, the Kennedys, the DuPonts, the Mellons, and the rest of the capitalist class, have a right to incarcerate the poor for crimes of survival, and we would be legitimizing the dehumanization of the rest of the brothers and sisters.

We will not give anyone up to the capitalist class. We will never legitimize the ruthless oppression meted out to the poor in the concentration camps. The poor and oppressed everywhere are struggling to take control of their own destinies. They are challenging the most repressive institutions of this society, often from inside the walls of the hellholes called prisons. The PSC stands in solidarity with these brothers and sisters, fighting the same enemy and determined to win.

All prisoners are political prisoners!
Tear the prisons down!