

C:1/1988

Dear Friends,

On November 1, the third anniversary of the Marion lockdown, the second conference to end the lockdown was held at Wellington Avenue Church in Chicago. Because several of you who have shown so much interest in Marion, Lexington and related issues were not able to attend, we thought it would be helpful to put together this summary of the day in an effort to keep you up to date.

The day started off with three workshops which were repeated, thus allowing people to attend two of them. There were about 125 people present in the afternoon who divided themselves pretty evenly among them. These workshops did not focus mainly on Marion. The reason we planned the conference this way grows out of our view that Marion is not a "prison problem", but rather one manifestation of the increasingly repressive political climate in this country. We see Marion as intimately related to the tendency of the changing face of "democracy" to demand more restrictions against individual rights and people's movements; to the rapidly increasing number of people imprisoned for political beliefs and activities; and to the fact that Black people are imprisoned at a rate higher than any other in the world. This notion was stressed in each workshop. The presenters for the workshops were selected so that a broad range of political perspectives and experiences would be represented at the conference.

The workshop on Legal Repression focused on the many aspects of government attempts to control and/or destroy progressive movements in the U.S.

Rachel Rosen de Golia, Executive Director of the Chicago Committee to Defend the Bill of Rights, opened the workshop with an overview of efforts by the federal government to concentrate more power in the hands of the Executive Branch. She charged that such moves are justified in the name of "national security" and that Congress has not been interested in democratic rights and, therefore, not interested in challenging such moves. Noting this trend has been shifted into high gear under Reagan, Rachel cited several examples which, in her view, show that the elements of a police state are already in place: limitations on access to FOIA files; restrictions on the rights of government employees to criticize government policy; administration appointment of federal judges; and the expanded FBI guidelines, legalizing government surveillance and infiltration of progressive groups.

Mary Ann Corley, who sits on the Board of the National Sanctuary Defense Fund, explained government moves against the Sanctuary Movement as an extension of its war in Central America--particularly attempts to silence refugees whose stories of government atrocities have moved many North Americans to action. Mary Ann explained how the arrests of the first Sanctuary workers coincided with the deepening commitment of the U.S. to a strategy of low intensity conflict against the people of Central America. She laid out several aspects of repression against Sanctuary, including: 1. Indictments and prosecution of Sanctuary workers; 2. Harrassment, including break-ins of Sanctuary offices, surveillance and denial of FOIA files based on the assertion that Sanctuary is a national security risk; 3. Attempts to split the movement by red-baiting and slander; 4. Attempts to discredit the movement by portraying refugees as terrorists and Sanctuary as a Marxist movement developing sophisticated clandestine operations. Mary Ann ended by asserting that the government has failed--Sanctuary is alive and activists are determined to continue their work.

Michael Deutsch, well-known progressive lawyer with the People's Law Office, began his portion of the workshop by defining repression as a function of the state to maintain unequal political and economic relations. Maintaining that repression is a permanent condition under capitalism, Michael then said there has been a change in government strategy in response to lessons learned during the sixties. The U.S. has begun to develop a sophisticated strategy of counter-insurgency aimed at stopping the development of resistance in the earliest stages. Focusing on the Puerto Rican Independence Movement as one of the governments's primary targets of repression, Michael explained how this strategy is aimed at criminalizing an entire movement by equating revolutionary activity with terrorism. In developing its strategy, the U.S. has studied repressive techniques employed in Northern Ireland, West Germany, Italy and South Africa. Its strategy is comprised of

many facets, including: developing new laws; revising old ones; expanding the use of technological intelligence; and using informants. He specifically addressed the issues of Grand Juries as a method of arresting and detaining activists without trial, and the Bail Reform Act which means those arrested can be held without bond if the government says they are a danger to the community or a risk of flight.

In the workshop on Political Prisoners and Prisoners of War, Barbara Zeller of the Committee to Fight Repression began by placing North American anti-imperialist prisoners in the history of the last five years of those who saw the need to mount armed actions against the U.S. war machine, acting in solidarity with peoples of Central America, Azania/South Africa, and New Afrikan/Black and Puerto Rican people here. These people are facing a "denial" system--denied access to media, denied visits from supporters and family, and denied political legitimacy. In a theme that would be repeated, she stressed that this was the state's attempt to break people who stood for some of the fundamental principles of an anti-imperialist movement.

Next, Chokwe Lumumba, Chairperson of the New Afrikan People's Organization, urged us to grapple with the political contradiction that arose when Europeans first enslaved Africans. This colonial experience, sometimes open, sometimes masked, taking on different forms during several hundred years, has always created the resistance of those called political prisoners and prisoners of war--from Nat Turner to today's prisoners of war of the Black Liberation Army. The Black Liberation Army, he pointed out, acted against killer cops and drug dealers, and expropriated money to support community action programs as well as African liberation movements. Support for them is not just a matter of "civil liberties" but of Black freedom.

Bob Bossie is a member of the Eighth Day Center for Justice and a spokesperson for the Plowshares activists. He pointed out that 1,000 people a week are being imprisoned due to the economic and political circumstances in the U.S., and the repression of those who struggle. The Plowshares activists said "No" to the violence of U.S. weapons and their victims. Bob pointed out that many white middle-class people are constantly facing society's attempt to break our wills and our consciences through manipulation or coercion. He urged us to break through our fear and speak out. And when we see people like Nelson Mandela, Leonard Peltier or Rafael Cancel Miranda, we must not distance ourselves from them by setting them up as heroes, or letting the government make them objects of derision as criminals. We, also, should refuse to let our hearts and wills be coerced.

The last speaker, Jaime Delgado, Chairperson of the National Committee to Free Puerto Rican Prisoners of War, is currently under Federal indictment for allegedly conspiring to aid a prison escape. He echoed that the government tries to break our will to act; and added that we sometimes undermine our own will by underestimating what has to be done. As the state shuts off more options for legal change, and the prisons become harsher and harsher, the prison system itself becomes a tool of counter-insurgency against all who dare to make a decision to act. Jaime said that since prisons are the point of confrontation between those who act and the state, Marion and Lexington must become rallying points for our movements. Freedom Fighters continue to represent to the state what the movement is trying to do, so the state reacts by trying to break their will to struggle through isolation and mistreatment. They also use prisons to try to weaken the revolutionary movements by attacking and repressing those who support their sisters and brothers in prison. But these Freedom Fighters, Jaime concluded to loud applause, are proof that the state is not all-powerful, and are examples of the strength and will of the people.

The presenters in the workshop on the Changing Nature of the U.S. Prison System gave talks that dovetailed rather nicely. Joan McCarty, longtime prison activist and Director of the Prison Workshop Players, read and discussed in detail a long letter from a collective of Black prisoners at Stateville, a maximum security state prison in Illinois, in which they gave their perceptions of how things have

changed over the years in which they have been incarcerated in the Illinois prison system. They watched as the "rehabilitation" model went out the window in favor of warehousing. They watched the prison administrators respond to overcrowding by spending vast sums on guard towers, as the population grew younger and more involved with gang violence. Joan was able to supplement their observations with her own as a long time prison activist and her observations were very timely. Steve Whitman, a member of the Committee to End the Marion Lockdown was able to gather together data from government sources and the United Nations to document the disproportionate imprisonment of Black people - at a rate six times that for white people - a rate higher than any other in the world! The fact of who is in prison gives great insight into what the purpose of prisons must be. Jose Lopez, national coordinator of the Movimiento de Liberacion Nacional - Puerto Rico (MLN-PR), spoke after Steve with a theoretical analysis of the changing nature of the prison system. His talk coincided with Steve's in a very interesting way. Jose dated major changes in the "criminal justice system" to 1965, the year of the assassination of Malcolm X and the establishment of the Uniform Criminal Justice Code. This was just about the time that Steve's data showed the beginning of dramatic increases in the number of people imprisoned by the U.S.

After the workshops, Steve Robideaux, a leader of the Leonard Peltier Defense Committee, was able to stop by and give a talk to the entire conference on the status of Leonard's case and the Native American struggle. Following Steve's talk, we showed a video of four Puerto Rican women Prisoners of War talking together from Pleasanton Federal Prison about the racism and alienation from "mainstream America" that brought them to the struggle, about special issues of women in the struggle, about their total dedication to Puerto Rican independence and socialism, and about the especially harsh prison conditions they have faced in U.S. control units.

After the video, we all shared a delicious dinner served by the Puerto Rican Cultural Center and then went upstairs to the sanctuary of the church to see a dramatic performance by the Prison Workshop Players. Their performance showed the effects of prison on Black people--their families, loved ones, and political leaders. Their moving portrayals made it clear that prisons attack the fabric of Black society and family life. Following the performance, we gathered together for the evening panel on Marion prison.

The Marion panel was slated for this timeslot in order to highlight it at the conference. This time, with about 90 people in the room, the presenters all gave very powerful, moving testimony to the horrors of Marion, to the fact that the Lexington Control Unit had just opened and was already more barbaric than Marion, and to the political significance of these issues. Members of the panel included Nancy Horgan, an attorney for Marion prisoners, Michael Deutsch and Chokwe Lumumba, who had spoken in workshops earlier in the day, and Jan Susler, an attorney with the Peoples Law Office. Each speaker addressed the problem of Marion from her or his unique perspective based upon substantial experience. They not only focused on the brutal conditions, but also on the questions of strategy and action that would change these conditions. Although the formal discussion did not end until after 10:00 PM, people still stayed and asked many questions.

Many good things came out of the conference. First, the word about Marion and Lexington and Control Units is definitely getting around. Last year at this time, virtually no one outside of our small circle knew of such things. Now such knowledge is more common. Second, we once again had a substantial collection of literature on the topics of the conference and on related topics as well and many of the people at the conference took free literature and purchased other books and pamphlets. Third, attendance was good. We estimate that about 175 people were present at one time or another and many of them were new people who we had never met but who were attracted by our leafletting, by notices that were placed in newspapers, and by signs that were hung around universities. Fourth, the presentations were generally of very high quality. All were prepared in advance and contained a great deal of new information presented in a coherent and meaningful manner. Fifth, we produced a new brochure which is available for general distribution. Finally, we had two main activities to build for off of the conference. One was a petition drive which is

demanding an end to the lockdown, a closing of all control units, and the stopping of selective mistreatment of political prisoners and prisoners of war. The other was the demonstration that was planned for December 6.

Despite the cold and rain, approximately 175 people turned out for the December 6 demonstration. After gathering at noon for a short picket and rally, we marched through Chicago's downtown shopping area. The sidewalks were filled with Christmas shoppers who stopped looking into decorated display windows long enough to read our colorful banners and to take leaflets explaining the demonstration. Our major goals for the demonstration were to make more people aware of the lockdown at Marion and the opening of the women's Control Unit at Lexington, as well as drawing attention to the existence of and the selective mistreatment of political prisoners and prisoners of war. We think the demonstration succeeded in these goals.

The march wound its way to the Metropolitan Correctional Center which embodies the Bureau of Prisons. Oscar Lopez, Puerto Rican Prisoner of War, and Kojo Boman Sababu, New Afrikan Prisoner of War, are currently incarcerated at MCC awaiting trial for an alleged escape attempt from Leavenworth Penitentiary. They have been held at MCC in inhuman conditions that have been the focus of a campaign led by the National Committee to Free Puerto Rican Prisoners of War. At this point, we held a spirited picket and rally with statements from several groups which were among those endorsing the demonstration. They included speakers from the American Friends Service Committee, the Chicago Religious Task Force on Central America, Synapses (a religious-based community organization that carries out activities in solidarity with the peoples of Central America, the Philippines, South Africa.), The Blacks in Law and Criminal Justice Clubs, and No Pasaran, a women's affinity group. A family member of one of the imprisoned Plowshares activists spoke, and we were honored to have the Rev. Ben Chavis, former political prisoner in the case of the Wilmington 10 and currently Director of the United Church of Christ's Commission on Racial Justice. Rev. Chavis exhorted all within earshot to work to get all freedom fighters out of jail, and to put the real criminals such as Reagan behind bars.

All in all we think the conference, the demonstration, and our general organizing, have been successful. But of course, this is only the beginning. We need more people on the Committee; we need people to sign the petition, and we need money. Most importantly, we need more people who understand the meaning of Control Unit prisons and who are willing to act on this understanding. The situation at Marion and Lexington demands our attention. We can succeed in changing things. We must succeed in changing things.

The Committee to End the Marion Lockdown has some additional literature that we would be happy to send to interested people. If you would like such information, please drop us a note. We would also appreciate any suggestions, comments or criticisms from you of our work. We have only limited capacity right now to answer such correspondence, but we will certainly read and seriously consider all input.

For Justice and Peace,

The Committee to End the Marion Lockdown