

DRIFTING MEMORIES FROM MARION PRISON

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It has been fourteen years since the constant and heroic struggle of the people liberated the five of us Puerto Rican Nationalists from prison. The first six years (from 1954 to 1960) I served in Alcatraz. The following ten years in Leavenworth.—And the last eight years in Marion. They took me there due to a strike in Leavenworth. They had me five months in solitary confinement, and without any warning, put me in chains, and took me to Marion. There they threw me in the hole for a few days, then gave me a kind of hearing (I recall them saying that they didn't want me in Leavenworth because I had too many friends there). Then they put me in the general population, where my work assignment was to wash dishes. They also prohibited me from getting near the prison industries.

In a little while, if I remember well, there was an escape or an attempted escape by some prisoners. I testified in favor of one of them. They took me to court chained at the feet, hands and waist, and the prosecutors and others wanted me to testify like that. Three times I refused the judge's orders to testify, until the prisoner asked me to testify.

They soon abused one of those they had recaptured (by the name of Jesus Lopez). The prison guards beat him with a club, and we went on strike. This was in 1972. They locked up about a hundred prisoners in solitary confinement. That is when they converted this cellblock into the control unit. Although since I arrived at Marion I knew that they had the Behavior Modification Program in practice, and the one who directed it in that prison was a psychiatrist by the name of Martin Groder. After seventeen or eighteen months, of the hundred placed in this control unit, only thirty-six of us were left, who, thanks in great part to the intense and constant work of the lawyers from the Peoples Law Office of Chicago, a court of appeals ordered the prison officials to release us from the control unit, considering it cruel and unusual punishment. According to certain sources, the thirty-six of us were candidates for the prison being built in Butner, North Carolina, which would be exclusively for Behavior Modification programs. Angela Davis struggled a lot against the realization of this prison.

I remember that they even wanted to fabricate a weapons case against the lawyer Michael Deutsch (that he had passed a weapon to me) so as to prohibit him from continuing to see me. The warden called another young lawyer to make him afraid of us. During those 18 months that they had me in the control unit, several of the prisoners went crazy (I remember two in particular, since they were my friends, and these were the only two times that I cried in prison, to know that they were going crazy and I couldn't do anything about it).

And I remember the beatings of Eddie Adams (they made holes in his testicles and then refused to let his mother visit so that she wouldn't see the

evidence) and the beatings of James Parker (they broke his legs) and of Don Locke (I saw his injuries when they took him out) and the beating of Hawaiian Al (a Hawaiian of Puerto Rican descent) and who was going crazy three days and three nights after the beating and the beatings of Curley Fee (who immediately following the beatings was found dead in the boxcars). I remember several hangings, among them a man they brought to lock up in a boxcar cell two cells from me and he begged, screaming, not to put him in there because he suffered from claustrophobia, but they still threw him in the hole, and the following morning he was found hung. (Damn it, just to think of it gets my nerves worked up). I remember when they served us mashed potatoes and on the first six plates (that the prison guards brought us) there was ground glass in the potatoes, and we refused to eat. Then the warden (supposedly) said that neither he nor the guards had anything to do with it. I remember the visits through glass and by telephone (with lawyers and family members); then when the fbi and secret agents came (they called us to the captain's office or to a supervisor or lieutenant and there the agents showed up) well! for the visit of these vermin they didn't strip or search us -- different from when our families or lawyers visited us, when we had to spread our legs and lift our testicles, etc.

And I remember how the prison guards (some of them, I should say) grabbed the nipples of some prisoners and twisted them until the man couldn't take it any more. I remember that I told one of the guys in the hole near me that if this vermin did that to one of my comrades (Oscar, Irvin, Andresito) I would dare him to get into a boxcar cell with me and show me what a man he was. I remember the drugs valium, prolixin, thorazine they gave us (they tried it twice with me, when my gums swelled up from when they kicked my mouth to pieces, knocking out teeth and leaving my jaw permanently crooked and they wanted to take advantage of my pain to get me hooked on these drugs, but I sent them to

And I remember the false accusations. Since they wanted to keep me in the control unit for a long time, and they knew they didn't have excuses, they invented a story that I had destroyed a boxcar cell, which was false. They held a hearing, and I remember telling them "That's not my style." I REMEMBER when they turned off the giant fan in the corridor and asphyxiated us cutting our air supply -- I remember climbing up to the vents trying to get air, then I suffocated. I remember the urine the guards threw on us. Then a congressional commission came (Herman Badillo was part of it) and corroborated the part about the urine. They found the bottles full of urine the guards used. And I REMEMBER gratefully brother Akinshiju (of the REPUBLIC OF NEW AFRICA) making a newsletter by hand on a piece of paper and passing it around. It was precisely this brother who recommended to me the lawyer Michael Deutsch. And I REMEMBER gratefully those good people from St. Louis who struggled to close the control unit. And I REMEMBER the words of that captain when they were forced to release me from the control unit: "We'll release you, but we can put you right back in." And I REMEMBER how before they locked me up in the control unit a prisoner McWilliams died, because he had a massive heart attack and they

were late in taking him out of the cell. He died on the way to the prison hospital!

And I REMEMBER when I got back to general population, they didn't wait long to throw me in the hole again for a couple of weeks for refusing to strip. And how soon, when my wife came from Puerto Rico to visit me -- they threw her in a room and stripped her, telling her that if she didn't strip they wouldn't let her see me. The lawyers found out about it and asked me not to let it provoke me. And I REMEMBER how one night, after all of us prisoners were locked in the cells -- how at eleven o'clock at night they open my cell and a bunch of them come in and take me out of the cell and take me out of the cellblock and strip me and when, after a while, they brought me back to the cell, everything was a mess! And they never told me why they did it. And I didn't ask. And I REMEMBER when they called me on the loudspeaker to the captain's office and when I arrived a lieutenant told me very coldly: "They called from Puerto Rico. Your father has been killed." And how after pressure from a lot of people, I was able to go to Puerto Rico (of course, handcuffed and all the rest) to my father's coffin, and on the way, in the airport at St. Louis they take a police dog out of his cage and put me in it, and, on the way back, they put me in a jail (I think in St. Clair County) where you can't tell if it's night or day -- and on arriving at Marion they put me in the hole, then take me out of the hole in handcuffs to give me a hearing, without my having violated any of their rules!

And I REMEMBER in the general population, at about noon and at five in the afternoon they called on the loudspeakers "Control medication to the hospital" and lots of prisoners walked like zombies to the hospital to get their thorazine, prolixin, valium, as they'd gotten them hooked.

And I REMEMBER from the beginning that they claimed that a doctor examined my sight, then after five months in the hole in Leavenworth, my sight began to fail and they wouldn't listen to me until my father sent them a letter that if they didn't examine my sight he would send a doctor with a lawyer.

And I REMEMBER when dona Isabelita Rosado wanted to visit me and they had a rule that whoever wanted to visit us (me) had to know us before we were in prison. And when I tell them that dona Isabel and I knew each other from before, then they said that if we knew each other it meant that she was a revolutionary like I was, and thus couldn't visit me -- or as we say in Puerto Rico, "you can't win for losing." And I REMEMBER when I found out that they had me on a "SPECIAL MONITORING LIST" and that I was under the direct control of Washington and how other prisoners had some "privileges" in visits and correspondence that were denied to me.

OH, YES, I remember how being in the control unit they put me in a cell next to mentally ill prisoners so that I wouldn't be able to sleep as they spent the entire night banging on the walls.

I REMEMBER that to beat the prisoners, first they gassed them, handcuffed them and then used baseball bats and axe handles to beat them. They had a group of guards ("goon squad") who specialized in beating up prisoners.

I also remember that they abused the prisoners by harassing their families and isolating them from those closest to them.

There are a lot more memories --but I want to end with optimism. I REMEMBER THREE OR FOUR PRISON GUARDS WHO THROUGH THE years came to my cell to say goodbye, telling me that they were leaving because they didn't want to lose their humanity. And I remember that guard who almost every morning gave me an apple and on one occasion told one of my sons that he could be proud of his father.

BUT MORE THAN ANYTHING I REMEMBER LEONARD PELTIER, HERMAN BELL, MARK, OSCAR WASHINGTON, GABRIEL TORRES (the last four from the BLACK LIBERATION ARMY) AND I REMEMBER AKINSHIJU AND KARAMOCO and so many other comrades and good brothers. AND IT WAS BEING IN MARION THAT WE MADE CONTACT WITH MY PEOPLE IN CHICAGO INCLUDING THE COMRADES FOR WHOSE EXCARCERATION WE ARE STRUGGLING TODAY. AND I WILL PUT SO MUCH LOVE AND EFFORT INTO THEIR EXCARCERATION, AS THEY PUT INTO MINE. THANK YOU, COMRADES OF THE SOUL AND OF THE HOMETLAND. FREEDOM FOR OUR POLITICAL PRISONERS AND PRISONERS OF WAR!