

DECEMBER 20.-- OUR THEORY WILL UNITE
WITH OUR PRACTICE AND WOMEN WILL TRULY BE IN SOLIDARITY
WITH POLITICAL PRISONERS

by Afeni Shakur

Earlier last month, when Judge Murtagh revoked my bail, I had the ironic pleasure of revisiting the women held inside New York City's only female detention center. In the six days that I was there, something struck me that had previously passed as another hopeless trait of capitalism. I would like to describe it here and now, along with its connection to a well known principle. "Information is the raw material for new ideas." Information: Although to most sisters in the Women's House of Detention, there is little practical difference in bails of \$100,000, \$1,000 and \$100 a large number of women are being detained at amounts ranging from \$100 to \$1,000. Simultaneously, a great deal of the charges accompanying these bails, are what we shall refer to as survival (or defensive) offenses. This means that these charges stem from acts which, if successful, would have eased some of the economic burden of the sister, thus eliminating any need to steal, prostitute, con, stick up or sell marijuana or drugs.

Obviously the problem, from the beginning, was an economic need; thus we have a political contradiction. When the trained mercenary (police) discovered this act of defense, he at no time inquired of the sister, why she felt such a compulsion to risk death or imprisonment, for such a small act. It never occurs to him to investigate the situation fairly and objectively. The nature of his job as a policeman dictates that he be unjust and subjective.

Meanwhile the sister is taken to a jail cell, where she is booked and held
yet
pending trial. No one has asked her if she is innocent, or if her actions were

justified, or even if her children are taken care of in her absence. Either the same night or the following morning, she is taken before a judge. He does not speak to her at all. He usually takes turns, looking either at a yellow sheet of paper that has her name, address, sex, age, race, religion and charge or charges, or he looks at the Assistant District Attorney, who has just been told of the case minutes or hours before, has made no objective investigation himself, and is paid to be the accuser. He is not asked to discover whether or not the sister is guilty or innocent, rather he is paid to assume she is guilty, and to gather any and all information and materials to lend credence to his assumption.

The Asst. District attorney reads off the charges with one or two new ones added for good measure, then he recites a well used speech about the criminal threat the woman poses on society. He asks the judge to set bail at some ridiculous amount that has nothing to do with the constitutional requirements for bail. He does not bother to follow those requirements because he understands that he will not be held responsible for upholding any of its codes. He has already been conditioned to ignore such an inefficient document.

The judge follows the suggestion of the Asst. District Attorney and sets bail. He does not ask her if she has eaten recently, if the clothes she wears are her only remnants. He does not ask her if her babies are fed every day or if they have a decent house to stay in. All he does is set what amounts to ransom and confines her to a building where she is guarded, ignored and harassed. There is no point in even dreaming about going home, because she knows she has no money (if she did she wouldn't be there anyway). Her friends have no money, or if they do, it is just enough to survive with. She faces a one to three year sentence and she cannot post bail or hire a lawyer. She lays

there waiting.

The court appoints, at random, a legal aid. He is employed by the state. He is given approximately ten caseloads a day and is either unable, or chooses not to adequately defend any of them. He has very little time to file all the complex motions necessary. The thought of a trial is repugnant to him (because he knows he can't - or won't - prepare for one).

The legal aid confers with his "client" only on the days she comes to court. He periodically takes a portfolio of cases to the Asst. District Attorney and asks for deals, in return he promises not to take the state through the costly trial process. He then tells his client to cop out to a lesser charge so that she can get out of jail at the "earliest possible time." She has very little choice. In fact she has no choice. She accepts. The judge first gives her a long speech about her "criminal nature" and tells her to rehabilitate so she can be an "asset to society." Then he gives her ninety days or six months. Sometimes he gives her a year. She is trapped!

She spends the entire sentence counting off days. In jail, she hustles to survive. Strange isn't it? Even in jail, the name of the game is money. She cannot buy cigarettes, basic personal necessities or the Sunday newspaper. The economic need is still there. Her instinctive compulsion for survival moves her to, in effect, pimp off her sisters in jail.

One of the other restrictions of women's jails is communications. There is no history of either political or religious struggle in women's detention centers. There were no Muslims who banded together ten years ago for any group victories, against the administration. As a result, these sisters are just now beginning to feel as though they are a part of the revolutionary struggle for complete liberation. The cry to free political prisoners is not one which they readily

associate with. We have not done enough to help them understand our concern for them. As a result of these conditions, a group of women in New York have come together in order to eliminate some of these conditions.

We are organizing brigades of women to force the prison administration to admit us into these pig pens so that we can find out from the sisters themselves what their specific needs are. We will then take steps to meet those basic needs (just as in the medium security of our communities, we are trying to meet the basic needs of our people). We will begin to take the necessary steps to insure the welfare of our sisters. Where there is a bail of an amount that we can raise, we will bail the sister out of the pig pen. We are beginning to send letters inside, so that the sisters know that we are putting our theories into practice. We want to utilize all of the progressive services available so that these sisters are given better treatment. The only way to educate is to communicate. We need help in all areas. We need money, decent jobs, advice, stamps, paper, revolutionary pressure on the prison administration and help for sisters who were addicts at the time of their arrest. We need clothes, houses, beds, every and anything. We need people to help us turn this idea into a revolutionary reality.

Solidarity in the struggle
Means sharing in the struggle!

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