

DEMANDS OF THE SISTERS INSIDE

While the Women's Bail Fund fully supports the demands of all prisoners and will struggle to see that they are met, we recognize that prison reforms are only a temporary means of dealing with the problem and that all jails are concentration camps set up by a racist capitalist system for Third World people and the poor. The following demands were received from inside the Women's House of Detention on December 18, 1970.

To the concerned people of New York:

We the prisoners of the Women's House of Detention wish to inform you of the barbaric conditions we are subjected to by the correction officials here in the House of Detention. The system breeds mental degradation and physical deterioration. The majority of us are Black and Puerto Rican. We cannot afford the ransom the courts call bail. It is apparent to us that you, the public, are not aware of the barbaric conditions that exist here.

Our grievances are:

1. We do not receive adequate medical attention. We do not have a doctor on duty twenty-four hours a day although there are seven hundred and fifty-four women in here. The doctors we do have are old and senile.

- a. We ask that all doctors practicing medicine here be required to take a medical Board examination at least once a year.
- b. We ask for a doctor to be on duty twenty-four hours a day.
- c. We ask that it be a requirement that any inmate suffering from any medical problem be permitted to see a doctor at any time of day or night, and that it not be left to the discretion of the officer on duty or the nurse in attendance.
- d. We ask for first rate medicine. That it be labeled properly and after it has lost its potency, it be thrown out.

2. We do not receive an adequate diet. We do not get any fresh vegetables or any fresh fruits. Our diet consists of beans, rice, potatoes, and powdered milk. We get hot cereal twice a week, one boiled egg once a week. The rest of the days we get cold cereal and powdered milk. The meats that we eat are as old as the building we must live in.

- a. We ask for our meats to be inspected.
- b. We ask for at least one glass of fresh milk daily.
- c. We ask for fresh vegetables and at least one piece of fruit a day.
- d. We ask for citrus juices once a day.

3. The House of Detention is infested with mice and roaches. They roam the building freely, carrying filth and disease. We are often bitten by these germ-carrying rodents. There is no extermination system.

- a. We ask that an exterminating company be allowed to come in twice a month to eliminate these health hazards.

4. There are four punishment strip cells where we are put if we receive an "infraction." The cells do not have any toilets, sinks, or mattresses. In them we are stripped of all our clothing. We do not receive any bedding for the cold tile floor. We are allowed to shower only every five days. We ask that these cells be shut down immediately.
5. We are beaten by the male guards. We ask that male guard brutality be stopped immediately. We are harrassed and threatened with an infraction by the female guards. We ask for the harrassment to be stopped.
6. Our funds which are sent and brought to us are misappropriated. We ask for an investigation.
7. We are unable to purchase in commissary bras, panties, socks, or stockings. None of these are given to us by the state as long as we are being held in detention. We ask that we be allowed to purchase bras, panties, socks, stockings, bobby pins for our hair, hair rollers, makeup, large rubber combs for the sisters in here who cannot comb their hair with the very small combs we can now buy, creams for our faces, lotions for our bodies so that we can care for ourselves as women.
8. We are two in a cell. The cells are 5' by 9'. Out of a fifteen hour day, we are locked up eleven of these hours. We ask for longer recreation periods.
9. The adolescents are separated from the adults as long as they are on detention floors. Once they have been sentenced, they are put in the same corridors as the adults. We ask that the adolescents be kept separate from the adults after sentencing.
10. When we are appointed a legal representative by the courts they do not come to us to discuss the facts of our cases. We ask that the courts require a visit to be made by the court appointed legal representative to us, the accused, before we go to court.
11. We are often brought to court and required to wait in the bull pen five or six hours in order to see a judge only to be told our cases have been adjourned. We ask that when we are brought to court that we see the judge.
12. There are some of us who have been here twenty months and still have not gone to trial. We ask for speedier court dates. We ask that our court dates be made known to us.
13. We have been raided at five-thirty in the morning, made to strip off all our clothing and to squat down, our personal belongings being thrown on the floor. The adolescents have been made to go into the kitchen and strip off their clothing in front of everyone.

a. We ask that the stripping of inmates be stopped immediately.

We have refused to lock ourselves in our cells to protest this inhuman treatment and have been met with water hoses turned on us by the prison officials. We are locked in our cells for eight to ten days as punishment for protesting. All of our privileges are taken away.

We the oppressed women of the New York House of Detention humbly seek your support and help. We who are your fellow human beings need you, the public, to help us in our struggle to eliminate these injustices.

Captive Sisters in the House of D.

This poem was written in blood in the prison cell of a Vietnamese woman who was killed after refusing to inform on her revolutionary brothers and sisters:

A rosy-checked woman, here I am fighting side by
side with you, men!
On my shoulders weighs that hatred which is
common to us.
The prison is my school, its mates my friends,
The sword is my child, the gun my husband.



PEOPLE WHO COME OUT OF PRISON CAN BUILD UP THE COUNTRY.
MISFORTUNE IS A TEST OF PEOPLE'S FIDELITY.
THOSE WHO PROTEST AT INJUSTICE ARE PEOPLE OF TRUE MERIT.
WHEN THE PRISON DOORS ARE OPENED, THE REAL DRAGON WILL FLY OUT!

--Ho Chi Minh, Prison Diary