REFLECTIONS ON CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTION TO VIETNAM WAR AND INCARCERATION -- TONY HINTZ

I returned my draft card to my local selective service office in Wisconsin at the end of 1966. (I had already been granted conscientious objector status in 1965 and was subsequently offered non-military assignments in the states but turned them down: a) because CO status was given very selectively; that is, many who tried to get it were turned down. b) (and most importantly) Because I felt that non-compliance or returning my draft card was the best way I could protest the Vietnam War.

I was arrested for violation of the selective service act in the late summer of 1968, went to court in Madison, Wisconsin in December and was sentenced to 2 years in federal prison, which I served in 1969 and 1970, 19 months, (24 months less 5 months of "good days" which were in greater supply then than now).

Prison experience: I served these 19 months in Sandstone, Minnesota, a medium security federal prison. I had little or no awareness of prison or of prison issues prior to this. This was my learning experience and what led me to want be a part of several prisoner issue organizations afterwards. (Chicago Connection, Friendship House, CEML / the Phone Project & the Zolo Committee).

I became aware of the racist and lower-economic class nature of US prisons. In *Sandstone perhaps* two thirds of the prisoner population were men of color (mostly African Americans but also Latinos and Native Americans as the federal Native American reservations funneled offenders into the federal as opposed to the state systems). A vast majority of the men also came out of a lower economic class. On the one hand this experience of living side by side with these men definitely had its good side and I learned a lot. But it also made me more aware of the injustice.

Even then, (and I think it is worse today), there was little real effort at rehabilitation, education or preparing these men for reentry into the outside community. Those programs that were in place were rather thin or superficial. And, as I've suggested above, this almost certainly got worse between 1972- 2005 during the imprisonment binge years when in many quarters rehabilitation became a bad word and there were efforts made to take away even some of those programs that worked.

The other thing that made a great impression on me was the degree to which seemingly small, psychological (and in a way indescribable) things became the hardest part of doing time: the subtle pressures, the relentless repetitive schedule, (each day becoming a virtual replaying of the day before), the almost total loss of control over one's life, the almost total lack of privacy, the noise, the vague fears such as not knowing if, when ill, whether or not one would get medical care. This makes me have a great deal of respect for the ordinary prisoner, not only the Mandellas but also those men or women, even those who actually did commit a crime, who have done a lot of time and have somehow managed to survive intact.