

BREAK THE CHAINS

A manifesto for the Break The Chains Conference, to be held on August 8-10, 2003, University of Oregon, Eugene, OR.

Issued in Spring of 2003. Please address feedback, suggestions, and criticism to: Break The Chains PO Box 11331, Eugene, OR 97440. Email: breakthechains02@yahoo.com Web-link: www.breakthechains.net



A collaborative effort between the Break The Chains collective (Eugene, OR), the Anarchist Prisoner's Legal Aid Network (AKA APLAN, Portland, OR) and the National Anarchist Black Cross Network.

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Prison Is Ground Zero

Perhaps no other single issue so convincingly illustrates the interconnectedness of the struggle for total liberation as does the prison industrial complex. Resisting prisons is resisting state repression and blatant social control; it is resisting the most terrifying examples of racism, sexism, and homophobia, the criminalization of the poor and capitalist exploitation of labor. For this reason, the Break the Chains conference hopes to exemplify the need for continued and heightened prisoner support with our ultimate goal being prison abolition. Prison abolition is a political vision that seeks to eliminate the need for prisons and acknowledges the devastating effects that prisons have on poor and marginalized communities. Prisoner support, for both social and political prisoners, means learning from the incarcerated, making their voices heard and their existence visible and meaningful.

The Break The Chains conference is dedicated to fighting repression, supporting prisoners, and eliminating prisons altogether. By providing anti-prison education, building on existing prisoner support efforts, learning from veteran prison activists, and initiating new campaigns against the prison industrial complex, we want to use this conference to initiate a new era of heightened prisoner-support and anti-prison activism.



We feel that the prisoner support and prisoner resistance movements, by virtue of their broad-based nature, offer the best starting points to begin to dismantle the webs of power.

Race, White Supremacy & the Criminal Justice System

Prisons in the United States are a crude example of how white supremacy and racism are played out in daily life. The modern-day slave patrols called police are given a green light to do whatever they want, whenever they want to keep oppressed people "in line." Private-prison profiteers and law-and-order politicians built the cages, and they depend on cops to fill them, using whatever tactics they want.

Over a year ago, we talked about the use of code words and subtle gestures for racism and imprisonment. Today, such dynamics are at work with the mass detention and tagging of Muslims and people of Middle Eastern descent. The genocide agenda has reached a new stage, as the techniques perfected against prisoners for the last 30 years are now being tried on the free-world population through people of color. White supremacy's war against colonized people is no longer just a "war on crime" or a "war on poverty," but a "war on terrorism." Just as with Vietnam, Nepal, Somalia and Occupied Aztlán, the United States expects us to wave flags when their lackeys open the concentration camps. The only proper response is using those flags to ignite torches to destroy the cages. History demands it.

The Coffee Creek Radical Correspondence Project:

A little thing for women on the outside.



Brought to you by Wildflowers, APLAN And Break the Chains.



Writing to Prisoners

From <http://www.spiritoffreedom.org.uk/writing.htm>

One of the main problems that puts people off getting involved in supporting prisoners is a feeling of being intimidated about writing to a prisoner for the first time. It is very hard to write a letter to someone you don't know: people find that they don't know what to say, they feel there are things they can't talk about, or think that prisoners won't be interested in what they have to say. Well this is a problem most of us have had to get over, so we've drawn up some suggestions to help you. Obviously these aren't rigid guidelines, and we don't pretend to have solved all problems here. Different people will write different letters. Hopefully they will be of some use.

FIRST THINGS FIRST

Some prisons restrict the number of letters a prisoner can write or receive, and they may have to buy stamps and envelopes: and prisoners aren't millionaires. So don't necessarily expect a reply to a card or letter. A lot of prisons allow stamps or and s.a.e to be included with a card or letter, but some don't. Letters do also get stopped, read, delayed, 'diverted'. If you suspect has been or will be nicked by the screws, you can send it Recorded delivery, which unfortunately costs a lot but then they have to open it in the prisoner's presence. Also you should put a return address, not just so the prisoner can reply (!), but also because some prisons don't allow letters without a return address. Of course it doesn't have to be your address, but be careful using PO Box numbers as some prisons don't allow these either!

WRITING FOR THE FIRST TIME

Say who you are, and if it's relevant that you're from such and such a group. Some people reckon it's better to be upfront about your politics as well, to give prisoners the choice to stay in contact with you or not. Say where you heard about them and their case.

The first letter can be reasonably short, maybe only a postcard. Obviously when you get to know people better you'll have more to talk about.

If you are writing to a "framed" prisoner, and you believe them to be innocent, it helps to say so, as it gives people confidence to know that you believe them.

Some people when they write to prisoners, are afraid to talking about their lives, what they are up to, thinking this may depress people banged up, especially prisoners with long sentences, or that they are not interested in your life. Although in some cases this may be true, on the whole a letter is the highpoint of the day for most prisoners. Prison life is dead boring, and any news that livens it up, whether it's about people they know or not, is generally welcome. Especially if you didn't know them before they went to prison, they want to know about you, what your life is like etc. Use your sense, don't write about anything that is likely to get a prisoner in shit with the screws, or get you or anyone else in trouble with the cops.

THEY'RE IN THERE FOR US, WE'RE OUT HERE FOR THEM

For people imprisoned from out movements and struggles it's vital to keep them involved in the ongoing resistance - telling them about actions, sending them magazines if they want them, discussing ideas and strategies with them. Use your head though. Some people will just want to keep their head down till they get out.

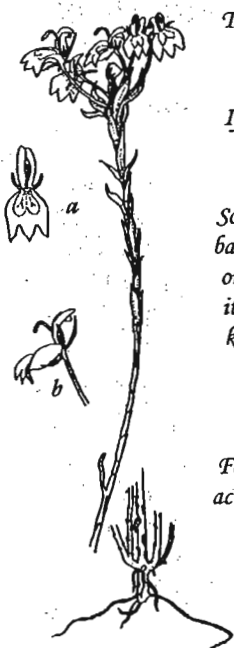
This was adapted from a leaflet produced by the Anarchist Black Cross.

A few dos and don'ts on writing prisoners whose backgrounds/politics you may not know.

Dos

Do use common sense. Use a "neutral" address, such as a Post Office Box, for correspondence. Do not divulge sensitive personal information (i.e. your home address, phone number, credit card and bank details, people's full names, etc.) to a prisoner, particularly one

Cont. on back



Downingia elegans
a. flower (front)
b. flower (side)

Women in Oregon's Coffee Creek Correction Facility seeking correspondence:

Gretchen Schumacher
#6732990
PO BOX 9000
Wilsonville, OR 97070

Interested in politics, education, cooking, music and art. Needs someone to help me fight DOC from outside, and new friends. In for being at the wrong place at the wrong time.

Suzanne Miles
#7122894
PO BOX 9000
Wilsonville, OR 97070

Interested in why courts work (or don't) and any type of case law. Might request books, beads, cards and art work. Want a pen pal to help me have an eye on the outside. Keep me up on trends, info, ect.
In for 25 years for the shooting death of my husband.

Randy Stewart
#9675536
PO BOX 9000
Wilsonville, OR 97070

Would like help with reading and spelling. I am a deaf woman looking for specific help, but also friendship.

Jana Simms
#13320330
PO BOX 9000
Wilsonville, OR 97070
Interested in art, karate, homeless kids and science. Want a pen pal with shared interests to network with. In for taking my kids back from the state (kidnapping).

Melanie Schmidt
#5992221
PO BOX 9000
Wilsonville, OR 97070

Native woman looking for someone to fight DOC from the outside. A real fighter, looking for more than just a pen pal.

Andrea Case
#11669857
PO BOX 9000
Wilsonville, OR 97070

Interested in reading, writing poetry, science, kids (they're our future), learning the ways of my native people, dance and travel. Needs a friend, someone that she can meet on the outside and still be friends with - companionship and the knowledge that I am not alone. Want a pen pal because I've been locked up since I was sixteen years old and am 23 now and don't know anything about the free side. My family disowned me and I yearn for some kind of support - support that my family doesn't give me. In for attempted robbery 1.

Hope Cavanaugh
#12494653
PO BOX 9000
Wilsonville, OR 97070

Interested in reading, hiking, skiing, fitness, animals, music and women's liberation. Need openmindedness, someone with convictions - yet is objective, community connection, honesty and respect. I want to connect with

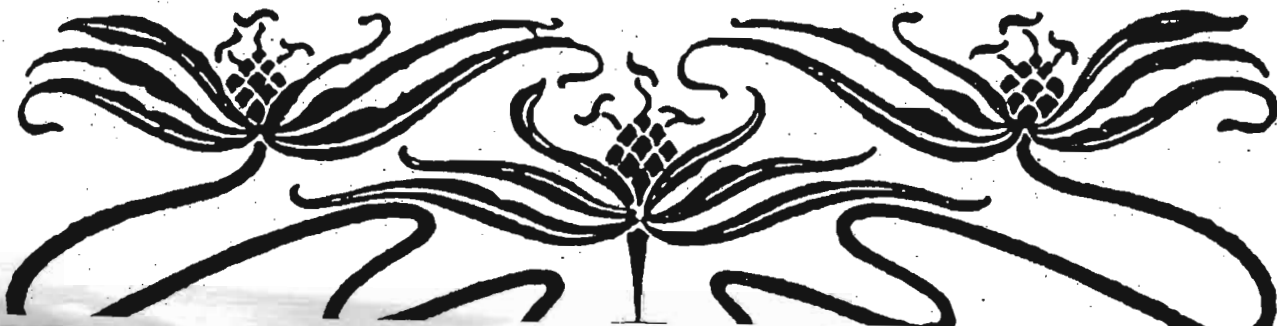
real people, have conversations beyond superficial stuff, someone who has educated opinions, ect. I am from lane county. In for robbery 1, serving 80 months and get out in 2005.

Amanda Durbin
#13230643
PO BOX 9000
Wilsonville, OR 97070

I aspire to be a naturopath and I love medicine. I love music - almost all of it. I love art - my favorite artist is Salvador Dali and my favorite poet is Mark Strand. Need a mentor who can be a supportive and positive influence. I'm from Portland. I am 19 years old and have been incarcerated since two weeks after my 16th birthday. In for attempted robbery 1, criminal conspiracy and committed robbery 1. I am two co-defendants robbed my workplace (McDonalds).

Christine Foos
#8949435
PO BOX 9000
Wilsonville OR 97070

Interested in anarchism, publishing and writing, astrology, sports, yoga, aerobics, poetry, crocheting and beading. I need someone who will share in my inspiration and be a real friend - and come visit me! I want a pen pal to be a special bond and someone to share the hard times with. In for road rage.



Cheryl Hutchings
#13459180
PO BOX 9000
Wilsonville OR 97070

Interested in the outdoors, horses and reading. I am changing my entire life and I need support. I want to stay connected to the community and keep in touch with reality. In for indentity thefts.

Lynn Marie Pritt
#5551893
PO BOX 9000
Wilsonville, OR

Interested in glass blowing, rafting, crafts and dancing. Need drug free friendships - I am getting out in 18 months and want to meet new women.



Camassia quamash

*Just a few fight back
prisoners (women who have
killed their abusers) from
California...*

*Valere Boyd
W-25189
CIW
16756 Chino-Corona Rd.
Corona, CA 92880-9508*

*Carolyn Havenhill
W-57827
515-29-02L
CCWF
P.O. Box 1508
Chowchilla, CA 93610-1508*

*Daisy Jane Benson
W-28860
CIW
16756 Chino-Corona Rd.
Corona, CA 92880-9508*

*Theresa Cruz
#W-40058,
CIW
16756 Chino-Corona Rd.
CA 92880*

*Flozelle Woodmore
W-26904
CCWF
P.O.Box 1508
Chowchilla, CA 93610*

*Frankie Williams
W-16357
B1-19-2L
VSPW
P.O.Box 92
Chowchilla, CA 93610*

*Myrtle Green
W-32887
CIW
16756 Chino-Corona Road
Corona, CA 92880*

Check out www.freebatteredwomen.ORG

A few **POLITICAL PRISONERS**

Sara Olson W94197
(aka Kathleen Soliah)
506-26-02 LOW
PO Box 92
Chowchilla, CA 93610
Former SLA member serving 26 yrs. Awesome and needs support.

Fran Thompson
1090915, HU3A
Chillicothe Correctional Centre
1500 W. Third Street
Chillicothe, MO 64601
Eco-activist serving a Life sentence for shooting dead, in self-defense, a stalker who had broken into her home.

Kathy Boudin # 894171
PO Box 1000
Bedford Hills NY 10507
Former Weather Underground member. Does really good work with incarcerated mothers and AIDS victims.

Marilyn Buck
00482-285
5701 - 8th. St. Camp
Parks Unit B
Dublin CA 94568
Part of the conspiracy resistance case. Freed Assata Shakur from prison to exile in Cuba. Serving 80 years. Rad but not needing lots of support right now.

Ana Lucia Gelabert
]# 384484
PO Box 600p
Marlin TX 76661
Cuban-American serving two concurrent life sentences in a Texas prison since 1984. She is 61 years old.

....but the list goes on and on and on and on.

Rubus parviflorus



you have never dealt with before. This is for your security and that of the prisoner. Be aware that authorities often read these letters and sensitive information can get into the wrong hands. Occasionally, prisoners have misused this information as well. Do not send money or honor immediate requests for money.

Do think ahead. Research local prison regulations. Learn about the prisoner before writing. Make sure to put a return address on your envelope. When first writing to an incarcerated person make sure you ask them specifically what the rules are for writing letters, and make a careful note of them. No one less than eighteen years of age should be writing a prisoner – again, this is for the prisoner's security as well as the writer's.

Do be forward and clear in your letter as well as your intentions. Say who you are, and if it's relevant that you're with an organization. Be upfront about your politics and say where you heard about the prisoners and her/his case. If you are interested in starting a pen-pal relationship and that is all, say so. Ask if they would like to correspond and if they'd like to discuss any topics, as well as what topics they don't wish to discuss. Keep your first letter reasonably short and to the point.

Do be patient. Prisoners may not write back or may take awhile. They may occasionally sound cynical, angry or disinterested in their words – keep in mind many "supporters" or people who've written before may have stopped writing them, made promises/pled to them, or they just had a rough day and they're venting that on paper. Responding to an angry letter with more anger is not helpful.

Do deal with the right channels. If a prisoner wants you to send a book, ask what channels their institution requires for that, or refer them to a Book-to-Prisoners project near their unit. If a prisoner is getting out in the next few weeks, do not offer your place to stay (no matter how desperate they sound) unless you have corresponded for a significant amount of time and are in contact with both a parole officer and a prison intermediary (e.g. prison chaplain). Even in cases like this, it is far more helpful to a prisoner to help them secure employment and develop a support base (whether that is through her/his church/mosque, family, friends, etc.) than to Chances are, there's a legal process to be dealt with in cases like this and they need to be followed by both you and the prisoner. However, use your head and don't land in a bad situation or one that will land the prisoner back in jail.

Don'ts

Do not make promises. Many well-meaning people write letters offering support to a prisoner, or make offers for help out of good will. Unfortunately, most never follow through and build false hope in a prisoner. This is not fair to them. If you're writing, don't make promises. Don't offer to do a support campaign if you can't make that time. Don't offer to send items when you can't afford it. Be honest. It's best to start writing and keep it that way, at least until a relationship is established.

Do not romanticize prisons or prisoners. Many activists have ideas about who prisoners are, why they're locked up, the system, etc. While it's correct to have political clarity about incarceration and the nature of the criminal justice system, it is not correct to romanticize a prisoner, anything they might be locked up for (especially a "social crime") and their lives. They're people just like you, and have strengths and weaknesses. It is dangerous to assume that anyone (free or jailed) is able to overcome all their personal weaknesses, or be completely truthful, or is not dealing with the stressful situation they're in negative ways. Some are estranged from their families as a direct result of their own actions. Some may have learned manipulative behaviors over the years. Prisoners are people like you.

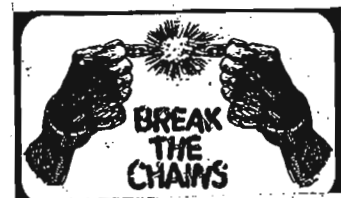
Do not discuss potentially illegal political action with a prisoner. Again, this is for your security and theirs. Prisoners have and can be implicated for outside action that violates the law and you should be mindful that, if authorities even find such information in the hands of prisoners, prisoners can face added time and harsh treatment.

Do not attempt to place political judgments on prisoners' experiences. Some prisoners, out of desperation, write publications to get pen pals and may not agree completely with the views of the paper, but read it for information. Some prisoners have been converted to Christianity or are Muslims. Some have views that may be somewhat backward. Rather than attack a prisoner, it's best to be polite, but firm, if there's something you'd rather not discuss or find objectionable. Do not attack or insult a prisoner because of their religions, preferences or experiences. If the prisoner declares her/himself a white supremacist, you are well within your rights to explain your disagreements, encourage them to reconsider their views and discontinue the relationship; please be aware that several white supremacist gangs have ties to the outside from prison and it is smart not to get into insults or threats against such prisoners. Don't send literature unless requested and be aware you don't have to go with every request.

Good luck!



WildFlowers
C/o Lily
PO BOX 11331
Eugene OR 97402



PO Box 11331, Eugene,
Oregon 97440.

Women & Prison

The prison system is one of the most misogynistic and patriarchal institutions in the Western world. The number of women in prison is growing at a rate faster than any other group in the US. Women are held in a system designed, built and run by men, for men. Women's prisons are disproportionately overcrowded, ill-equipped and under funded. They have fewer medical, education and vocational programs than men's prisons, and even then, the programs provided are often not designed by or for women. In 1995, 80 percent of women entering the prison system were mothers and removal from their children is reportedly the greatest punishment felt by many mothers in prison. Women's offenses are rarely cruel, dangerous or profitable. More often than not, women in prison are doing time for survival and/or consensual crimes: crimes in which there are no victims. Unfortunately, when women's crimes are violent or dangerous, those crimes are primarily committed to please a male partner or are, in fact, against an abusive male partner. Women receive disproportionately long sentences for killing a "romantic" partner, almost always in self defense. Research proves that the link between women and prison and women who have been abused is outstanding. Once in prison, the abused woman continues to be abused by men who hold power over her: both metaphorically and literally. Like in men's prisons, the guards are typically male and have total control over their female subjects. Women in prison must succumb to random and intrusive searches; they must take care of their most intimate needs while under surveillance; and full body searches are allowed in all women's prisons. Prison is patriarchy and we combat patriarchy in all its forms!



Queer, Transgender & Gender Variant Prisoners

All too often, prison mirrors society at large. In a society where queer, transgender and gender variant folks are ignored and vilified, it will be so in prisons as well. Queer, trans and gender variant prisoners are a criminalized class of folks to begin with. Breaking out of a gender norm is automatic deviance and becomes a criminal act. With already limited options, transgender folks all too often find themselves imprisoned for many of the same offenses as women, such as small time drug offenses and petty prostitution. Transgender and queer persons are also almost 10% more likely to end up in prison psychiatric units, leading one to wonder if it is not their sexuality entirely which has rendered them "criminal".

Once in prison, these folks often find that they are that they are a second class prisoner. Transies often find themselves used as pawns in prison yard politics. They are used as "trade", sexual slaves, wives to fellow prisoners and humiliated from all sides. Their health care needs, including hormone therapy, are often totally new to prison health care providers and are entirely ignored. Transgender and queer prisoners also make up a good percentage of prisoners in the US with AIDS, and then face a double stigma: shunned by both prisoners and staff because of their HIV status and mock and denigrated because of their gender identity. Working for transgender prisoners is attacking the prison industrial complex in a blind spot and actively supporting those most vilified in and outside of prison.

The Necessity of Supporting Political Prisoners/POWs

Any movement that does not support its political internees is a movement that is destined to fail. When power is challenged, be it in South Africa, occupied Palestine, Indonesia, Ireland or the Americas, it inevitably turns to violent repression and political imprisonment to maintain itself. In order to avoid defeat, movements must become highly organized and capable of combating the repressive forces of the state apparatus, and they must be able to support their comrades and allies in the event that they are arrested or imprisoned. Few would commit themselves to a movement that would leave them isolated behind prison walls, or a movement that is incapable of sustaining itself in the face of state repression and police intimidation. Therefore, it is absolutely necessary for any movement to develop the infrastructure to fight the repression and support its political prisoners with meaning and significance.

Prison Abolition

Our resistance to the prison system is two-fold. As we act to support the circumstances of today's prisoners, we recognize that our ultimate goal is to make obsolete our current prison support work by eradicating the role prisoners, policing and surveillance play in society. When the basic needs of people are met through the adequate attainment of food, housing, medical and social services, education, and community based political and economic systems, the unbridled power held by police and the courts will be unnecessary to the maintenance of a healthy society. Abolition means that the ability to provide for oneself and loved ones will no longer be determined by institutions of the state that serve the interests of an elite class, but by the people for the people.



Capitalism & Prison\$

To struggle against the prison system is to struggle against capitalism. Both are dependent upon prejudice and hierarchal power relations, which serve to keep people divided and to rationalize and legitimate the oppression and exploitation of a given group of people.

Capitalism cannot exist without the existence of a massive prison complex for several reasons. The first reason being that a system such as capitalism, with its dependency on exploitation and imperialism, needs to create an effective deterrent to opposition; prisons serve this purpose - they serve to terrorize and intimidate the opponents of capitalist brutality with the threat of imprisonment, and all the suffering that implies. Prisons are used as efficient tools of class society (capitalism) in other ways; prisons can be - and all too often are - used to warehouse oppressed peoples and those deemed undesirable by the capitalist system. These imprisoned "undesirables" make ideal workers for capitalist enterprises because they have little or no rights - they're forced to be obedient providers of cheap labor.

The anti-prisons movement is increasingly anti-capitalist precisely because prison growth is the logical outcome of the capitalist system. Likewise, the anti-capitalist movement is increasingly focused on prison issues because within prison walls lies an army in the making. If the anti-capitalist movement can win the allegiance of this army, its likelihood of succeeding is far greater.

Vision

We are organizing this conference to educate people about the bleak reality of the prison crisis, to mobilize people from the anti-repression, prisoner-support and anti-capitalist movements, to humbly host like-minded activists from other regions in what we hope is to be an extremely powerful and productive convergence, to learn from survivors of the prison system and gain from them invaluable lessons about the nature of the beast we are up against, and to begin the difficult task of developing a cohesive, organized, diverse, and effective movement against state repression and the politics of mass imprisonment.

As the ruling elite intensifies its repression more & more broadly, such a movement becomes necessary now more than ever before.

Dear friends:

We realize that we have left out a number of important topics in our mission statement (health care, and the issue of prisons & environmental destruction, for instance). It would be difficult for us to cover all relevant issues related to the Prison Industrial Complex in one leaflet. We do, however, intend to cover all of these issues throughout the course of our conference.

The organizing of this conference is still in the beginning stages, thus we have not yet sorted out many important logistical issues. Comprehensive information on this conference will be available very soon through our website at www.breakthechains.net. Please get in touch with us if you're interested in becoming involved in this project. Feedback, practical assistance, and constructive criticism is very appreciated.

We are desperately in need of funds for this conference. Contributions in the form of well-concealed cash and checks made out to "Break The Chains" can be sent to the address below.

In struggle - the Break The Chains collective. PO Box 11331, Eugene, OR 97440.

Application for Workshop Slot at BTC Conference:
(For organizations and individuals willing to do presentations and workshops)

1. Name: _____

Contact Info: (Mailing Address) _____

(Email Address) _____ (Phone #) _____

2. Summary of political work and goals: _____

3. Proposed topic of workshop(s), with short description: _____

4. What do you need in terms of housing?

- I/We are willing to stay with conference organizer's ()
- I/We need hotel reservations ()
- I/We can stay with friends ()

5. Will you be requesting a speaker's fee and/or compensation for travel expenses?

- Mandatory ()
- Not Necessary ()
- If Possible, But Not Mandatory ()
- Other _____

6. Please list any other special needs or requests you or your group may have:

Please send this form to **Break The Chains** PO Box 11331, Eugene, OR 97440 USA.
Write to us, or email us at breakthechains02@yahoo.com for more information. Thanks!

STOP THE WAR ON IRAQ!

Statement from the Prison Activist Resource

The stupendous amounts of money being spent by the military industrial complex (MIC) are beyond any sane person's fantasy/nightmare. The masters of unreason are continuing the growth of the prison industrial complex (PIC). The Federal Bureau of Prisons now holds the record for more prisoners in the world than any other prison system. The 'just-us system' appears to have no need to recognize any of the so-called constitutional rights of the accused.

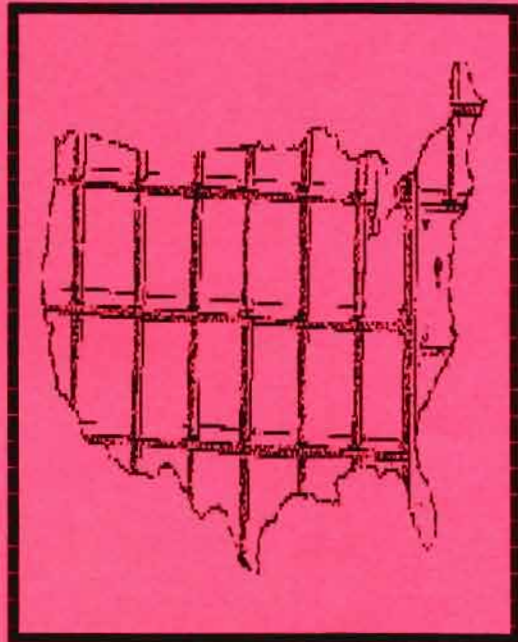
PARC is also opposed to the war on terror which, like the war on drugs and the war on crime, targets poor people and people of color. We have seen the war on terror legitimize the expansion of INS law enforcement powers - allowing for the detention and deportation of thousands of immigrants, and more recently the forced registration of Arab, Asian and African immigrants throughout the country. This is only one example of many on how the military industrial complex feeds the prison industrial complex in a cycle that destroys communities while creating profits for capital.

In California, alone, we've seen proposed budget cuts that would gut funds from education (libraries will be closed & teachers may be laid off), from the social responsibility of caring for poor children and elders (more than one million children in California will be without any medical insurance), from aid to disabled citizens (attendants will be eliminated as well as transportation services), in short - from all services that have anything to do with citizens day to day needs; while prison and military spending continue.

If you are against war for oil, war for profit, war against poor people and people of color - stand up and be counted!

NO WAR FOR OIL!

Prison Activist Resource Center
PO Box 339, Berkeley CA 94701
Phone: 510-893-4648. Fax: 510-893-4607



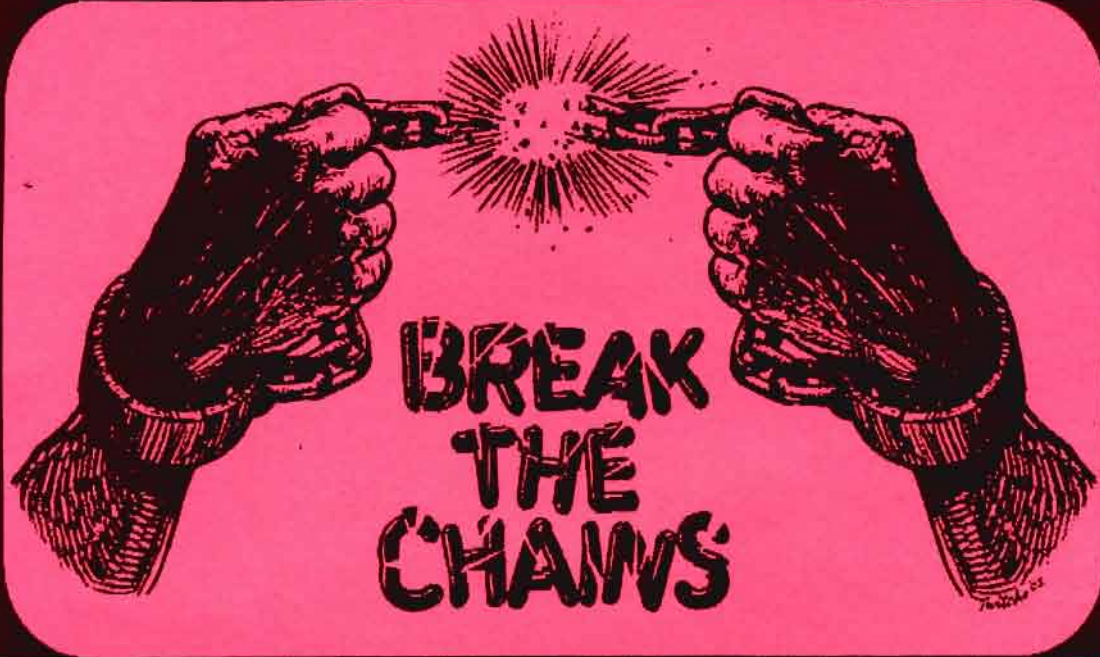
**IN A SOCIETY WHERE THE LAW UPHOLDS
EXPLOITATION AND ORDER SUPPORTS
INJUSTICE AND FASCISM, WE MUST BY
NECESSITY BREAK THE CHAINS THAT
CONFINE US AND OTHERS TO
SLAVERY AND INJUSTICE.**

**IF WE BE CALLED CRIMINALS BECAUSE
WE SEEK THIS, THEN LET US
HISTORY JUDGE US.
BUT LET US NOT SUPPORT SLAVERY,
LET US DIE IN
FURTHERANCE OF FREEDOM,
LET US BREAK THE CHAINS
THAT BIND.**



**GRASSROOTS REVOLUTION
NOW!**

NO MORE PRISONS!
ANARCHIST BLACK CROSS NETWORK



Contact: *Break The Chains* PO Box 11331, Eugene, OR 97440. Email: breakthechains02@yahoo.com Web-link: www.breakthechains.net

FREE ALL POLITICAL PRISONERS!
ANARCHIST BLACK CROSS NETWORK

From:
Break The Chains
PO Box 11331
Eugene, OR 97440
USA

To:

