

Willie Tate shot in San Francisco

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San Francisco

Willie Tate, one of the San Quentin Six, was critically injured in a shooting incident here last week. He was shot by Earl Satcher, a Black ex-convict with a highly controversial past. Satcher himself was killed in a gun battle that followed and three of Tate's companions were arrested and charged with first degree murder in Satcher's death.

Tate remains in serious condition in San Francisco General Hospital. At this point, police are considering Tate an unarmed victim and are not charging him with any crime. A 24-hour police guard is stationed outside his hospital room for his own protection. His friends have also set up their own screening network for hospital visitors.

The shooting occurred outside the San Francisco Cooperating Warehouse, in the early evening April 26. The San Francisco Bay Area Food System was holding a meeting inside. The Food System is a network of nonprofit natural food stores, distributors and bakeries which has become a progressive political force in the Bay area.

Willie Tate has, for the past six months, been a worker at Ma Revolution's Natural Food Store—one of the collectively-run stores which belongs to the Food System. Ma Revolution's has taken the initiative in raising the political commitment of the Food System. Satcher had been waiting outside the meeting with two Doberman pinschers and a group of armed followers when Tate arrived for the meeting.

After Tate was shot, more shots were exchanged. When police arrived, Satcher was dead. Police arrested Diane Dally, Gail Mahoney and Nate Harrington, who had arrived at the meeting with Tate. Harrington and Mahoney are coworkers of Tate's at Ma Revolution's.

Satcher's presence outside the meeting was attributed to an attempt by Satcher and members of the Tribal Thumb—a group he organized—to gain control over sectors of the Food System.

TATE HAS WIDE SUPPORT

Tate spent 10 years in prison for a series of minor offenses, beginning with being picked up as a runaway at the age of 14. He spent five years in San Quentin's maximum security Adjustment Center until his term expired in December 1974. A month later he was released on bail pending his trial with five others on charges of assaulting and killing guards the day George Jackson was murdered.

As the only member of the San Quentin Six on bail able to speak in public, Tate bore most of the responsibility for building support for the six and for expressing their solidarity with other prisoners and movements. Tate's political principles, the struggle of the six, hard work and personal warmth won him many friends and supporters. Tate and two others were acquitted in that case late last summer and a fourth prisoner was released after being convicted of only minor charges.

Satcher's past is more controversial and some regard him as a possible agent provocateur. He earned his reputation as an activist at Soledad prison where he organized various hunger strikes and was one of a small group of Black prisoners on the prison yard at Soledad the day when three Black prisoners were shot and killed by a tower guard. It was that incident that touched off the series of events leading to the Soledad Brothers Case, the assassination of George Jackson and the trial of the San Quentin Six.

When Satcher was released on parole, he began to organize politically, forming the Tribal Thumb, which has primarily consisted of young whites and a few ex-convicts. Controversy over Satcher's politics was sparked when a group of his followers were arrested in



Judith Colby

San Quentin Six member Willie Tate.

an extremely inept bank robbery attempt and Satcher, although he was picked up by police only a block away, was released. One of the women convicted of the robbery testified she had been terrorized and brutalized into participating by Satcher and other Tribal Thumb members.

When Popeye Jackson, another well-known prison leader who was regarded as the head of the United Prisoners Union, was shot and killed, Satcher and Tribal Thumb were among the prime suspects. Later, another member of Tribal Thumb was arrested and charged with Jackson's death, but Satcher was again not arrested although he was named as an undicted co-conspirator.

After the shooting, workers at Ma Revolution's issued a statement condemning Tate's attackers and supporting the three who were arrested. In it they stated that Tate was working at Ma's and in the Food System "because he wanted to serve the people who had supported him and the rest of the San Quentin Six...." His assailants, they claimed, "have been known in the past to use violence and intimidation against innocent people for personal and political gain."

A statement by the Black Liberation Army (BLA) and the Black Guerrilla Family (BGF) was more explicit. The BLA and BGF are two clandestine organizations, with a base in the California prison system, which supported the San Quentin Six.

The communique stated that Satcher threatened Tate and others at an earlier Food System meeting and arrived at the meeting the night of the shooting "armed and with the intention of a physical assault." Satcher's shooting of Tate, they said, was unprovoked. They further added that "Tribal Thumb has threatened the lives of those whom they feel are responsible for Satcher's death.

Cautioning against such action, the BGF and BLA urged Satcher's followers and others to be aware that "the Cointelpro era has [not] ended" and to learn from history that agents infiltrate progressive organizations for the purposes of dividing them." The communique urged those who felt moved to seek revenge to aim their attacks instead at "the militarily armed fascist state."

Meanwhile, Mahoney, Harrington and Dally were arraigned and pled not guilty to first degree murder charges. Ma Revolution's has insisted that all charges against Harrington, Mahoney and Dally are completely unfounded and has asked all progressive people to support them and Tate.

The hospital issued a press release saying so many calls were inquiring about Tate's condition that a special number has been set up to handle these calls (415-285-3220).

A defense fund for the three is being formed and contributions may be sent to Peoples Food System Defense Committee, 2525 Telegraph Ave., Berkeley, Calif. 94704.