

**SKATZES/LUCASVILLE FIVE SUPPORT BULLETIN NO. 18. Feb. 1999**

ACT I, SCENE 4: TUESDAY, APRIL 13 AND WEDNESDAY, APRIL 14

(In Scene 4 we continue the negotiation story, focussing on Tuesday April 13 and Wednesday April 14. The prosecution tried to use isolated quotations from George's words on the prison telephone to prove his guilt. We think that these words, examined fully and in context, demonstrate his persistent effort to end the rebellion peacefully and to save lives.

Skatzes used a great deal of profanity in his telephone negotiations on April 13, just as he had in speaking through a megaphone from the yard the day before. We think this is because of the frustration George felt in talking to prison negotiators who he felt were not negotiating in good faith at a moment when the lives of eight guards, held hostage by the prisoners, hung in the balance. We believe that readers will notice a significant difference in George's manner on Wednesday April 14 when, for the first time, he felt that the man on the other end of the line was working with him toward a solution.

Telephone negotiations between the prisoners in rebellion and prison authorities had begun on Monday April 12. At first they were disorganized. Initially the authorities insisted on speaking through Jack Bendolph, a case manager at Lucasville to whom the prisoners objected. On Tuesday April 13 at 5:56 AM, the authorities began to tape the telephone negotiations. Later in the day, Dave Burchett replaced Bendolph as the prison negotiator.

By April 13, the prisoners' negotiating team had come to be James Bell and George Skatzes. Just as the two men who went out on the yard the preceding day to try to begin negotiations were one black (Cecil Allen) and one white (George Skatzes), so the telephone negotiators for the prisoners on April 13 were one black (Bell) and one white (Skatzes).

During the morning the negotiations were conducted by Bell. He tried, unsuccessfully, to arrange for the release of a psychotic prisoner and a prisoner who had tried to commit suicide. He also sought repeatedly to induce the authorities to put Warden Arthur Tate on the phone. Prisoners indicate that Bell's speech was difficult to understand and that this was one reason why Skatzes took over as telephone negotiator in mid-afternoon.

Throughout Scene 4 the electricity remains off, and the

scene is played in semi-darkness.

In contrast to Scene 3, Scene 4 takes place on the stage. The stage is as it was in Scene 2: an improvised barricade at stage L, the gym as represented by its bleachers at stage R. Center stage is the office in L-2, now functioning as occupation headquarters.

As the scene begins, two men are seated facing the audience. George Skatzes is on the R. Next to him is seated a white man in prison clothes, blindfolded. This is a hostage guard, Darrold Clark.

There is a small table in front of them and a telephone on the table.

The stage is dark except for a lit candle at either end of the table.)

SKATZES:<sup>24</sup> I'm telling you, it's getting out of hand. I'm telling you these people are getting edgy. They're in the fucking dark. We need that electricity on to assure these guards' safety.

I'm going to let you speak to Officer Darrold Clark. (He hands the telephone to Clark, who, being blindfolded, fumbles to hold it securely.)

CLARK: The main thing's the lights. Where we can see and everybody's not a nervous wreck. . . . Please do this. . . . These guys are treating us very, very, very well and they don't want to do no problem. They don't want to hurt us or nothing. They want to get out of this peacefully, but you guys are forcing them to do this shit. . . . No officer yet has had his life taken. You understand that? . . . [T]hey've already offered to let . . . a long time ago . . . the ones that was hurt, to go out. And you guys are just fucking with us man. This is my life, guy. (He hands the telephone back to Skatzes.)

DAVE BURCHETT (as if on a speaker phone): George, this is Dave Burchett. We will turn the water and electricity back on if you will release two hostages.

SKATZES: This is not a trade-off. This is something that

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<sup>24</sup>All dialogue is drawn from words actually spoken at the time. Telephone negotiations were recorded by the authorities and later introduced as evidence at trial.

you assholes have taken away from us, something that is essential to these employees' safety.

BURCHETT: You know, one of the things that we need . . . we want to work with you, but we need something from you . . . some good show of faith.

SKATZES: Our show of faith is that we're busting our balls to keep one of these fucking inmates in here from killing one of these officers. We have shown our good faith by nobody killing one of these guards. There are eight guards alive. That's the good show of faith. We're [not] in no trade-off type position on this. You have taken this away from us. You are going to give it back to us.

BURCHETT: I will have to go to my boss before there can be any change in our negotiating position.

SKATZES: You don't understand. We as inmates in here have a certain amount of control and you can hear that it's getting out of control now. (Extremely loud yelling from background.) But I'm telling you, we have a certain amount of control, but you are taking away every fucking tool we've got to work with. We have worked overtime, walked these fucking halls and assuring these people out here, man, that things are going to be all right. . . . Now, you've taken all these tools away from us. You have put us in the fucking position to where, man, it, it's, you know, it's, it's going beyond control. Would you please listen to that? (Continued, loud screams in background.)

BURCHETT: I, I, I . . .

SKATZES: Now . . .

CLARK (reaches for telephone): Hear this. Just turn the fucking water and stuff on, please?

BURCHETT: Can I speak to Ratcliff and Demons?

(Two more guards, also blindfolded, are brought to center stage. Chairs are provided for them at the table. Ratcliff is white, Demons black.)

RATCLIFF: Hey, just listen. Do what these men ask. Hey,

they're doing nothing to us. They're treating us great. You're taking things away from us, the water, that's ours too. They're giving us water. They're checking on us every ten minutes. The lighting is ours. They're giving us a radio so we can listen. They're giving us everything. They tried to get me an outside phone call, you guys wouldn't let me have. I mean, they [are] just wanting to cooperate. Don't put our life . . . .

(Skatzes and Ratcliff speak almost in unison about turning on the lights.)

RATCLIFF: Come on man.

SKATZES: Get these . . .

RATCLIFF: We've got family.

SKATZES: . . . mother fucking lights on. Turn the . . .

RATCLIFF: Get the lights on . . .

SKATZES: . . . lights on . . .

RATCLIFF: . . . man. We've got families and everything else.

DEMONS (reaching for the telephone): This is Demons. You know it's me. I live on Finley Street. I want my union rep to know that we're not acting fast enough. We should give into their demands, because the inmates are not asking for that much.

SKATZES: Listen, I'm going to offer a package. If you will turn the electricity and water on again, and permit me to meet eye-to-eye with the news media, the prisoners will release two hostages.

BURCHETT: I will have to take that proposal to my boss.

SKATZES: I want you to understand one thing. There are no ring leaders in this. Whatever started this, I do not know. But thank God I, I'm fortunate enough to be in the position that once the thing escalated, and once the assaults and whatever has taken place initially, that a few of us were in here, able to regain control of this in here and you are destroying that

structure for us. You understand that? . . . You have upset our order by turning off this power. You have taken something away from us again. You are fucking our game plan up as far as keeping these people alive. You are fucking our game plan up as far as keeping order in here. You realize what people are like when it's stone dark out there. Can you understand that? Can you relate to that any kind of way at all?

Alright, we're working towards common ground, but . . . you people want to sit there, and take, take, take and no give. We have had this situation cast upon us. Again, I repeat, there are no ring leaders in this. I do not know what started this, other than the fact of [Warden] Arthur Tate's oppression. . . . But we have had this cast upon us and we are forced to deal with this. . . . It's a life and death situation in here for all of us . . . . You people don't seem to want to realize this. You don't seem to want to meet on common ground with us. It's not going to be, and I repeat that, please hear me, it's not going to be all take, take, take from you.

(Pause.)

I've spelled this out in anguish.

(All at table rise and slowly, as if burdened, leave the stage. The stage goes completely dark to signify the passage of a night. Then footsteps approach the table again. The candles are lit. Skatzes resumes his seat at the telephone, alone.)

On Wednesday, April 14, George Skatzes on behalf of the prisoners in rebellion, and Dave Burchett for the authorities, negotiated over the telephone a solid first step toward a peaceful settlement.

Cross-examining Sergeant Hudson at Skatzes' subsequent trial, Skatzes' trial attorney elicited an admission that on the evening of April 14 the negotiators were "on the verge" of the release of two hostages in exchange for the opportunity to make a media broadcast, and were in "elevated spirits."<sup>25</sup>

The tentative agreement was the result of five hours of negotiations between Skatzes and Burchett, from about 5:45 p.m. to 10:40 p.m. The two men canvassed endless details, coming back to some of them again and again.)

BURCHETT: Where will your spokespersons meet the media?

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<sup>25</sup>State of Ohio v. Skatzes, p. 2158.

SKATZES: I'm not expecting them [the media] to come down here in L-Corridor or something like that. . . . I'm willing to step out of here and meet them on equal terms in the yard.

How will you choose who from the hundreds of media at the prison will talk with us?

BURCHETT: How can the safety of the media be guaranteed? You've got your people ready and behind you to go?

SKATZES: I'm going to talk to them as soon as I get off this phone.

BURCHETT: Are they good? Have you talked to them about this and have they an understanding of what we're working on?

SKATZES: Let me handle that.

BURCHETT: Well, I just want you . . .

SKATZES: You let me worry about that part of it, all right?

BURCHETT: Do you think if it takes me a little bit to get this ironed out that you can control things on your end until the morning?

SKATZES: We're giving it our best shot, believe me. As soon as everything seems set, I will make the rounds of the occupied cell block. I like to keep everybody fed with as much positive information as I can. It gives them all hope to hang onto.

(The day ended for the exhausted negotiators like the end of a scene from "The Waltons.")

SKATZES: All right, Dave.

BURCHETT: All right. Thanks, George.

SKATZES: All right. Say a prayer for us.

BURCHETT: I sure will.

SKATZES: God bless you.

BURCHETT: You too.

SKATZES: Thank you.

BURCHETT: All right. Bye.

SKATZES: Bye.

(George blows out the candles. When they are next lit, George and another prisoner are sitting on a bed at the very back of the office area in the center of the stage.)<sup>26</sup>

SKATZES: We're going to give up two hostages in the morning, you know. They are going to bring Channel 10 news in here.

OTHER PRISONER: No, we're not going to give up two hostages.

SKATZES: Well, that's the way it was set up. That's what we're going to do.

OTHER PRISONER: (Indistinct.)

SKATZES: All you want to do is cut one of these officers' head off and send it out there to them. I'm not killing no officer. That's not going to be done. That's out.

OTHER PRISONER (angrily): Well, they're not going to go for this at the meeting in the morning.

SKATZES: What meeting?

OTHER PRISONER: We got a meeting at 7:00 or 7:30 in the morning before we're doing anything. And we're not giving up two hostages in the morning.

(Skatzes and the other prisoner exit. End of Scene 4.)

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<sup>26</sup>This last patch of testimony in Scene 4 is drawn from a transcript of a State Highway Patrol interview, after the surrender, with a prisoner who was in the occupied cell block.

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