

COMMITTEE FOR PRISONER SUPPORT IN BIRMINGHAM (CPSB)

In November of 1973, a group of Birmingham citizens, deeply concerned about the quality of prison life in America, came together to form the Committee for Prisoner Support in Birmingham (CPSB).

On February 15th and 16th of 1974, this committee sponsored a conference that focused on the relationship that exists between American Society and its penal systems. Many people, over three hundred, attended this conference. Some came with some vague perceptions that things were not "right" with our penal systems throughout this country, and indeed that things were not "right" with our Alabama Prison System. Almost all left with a commitment to work to improve the deplorable conditions that are a reality for men and women incarcerated in this state. They left with a commitment to deal with the injustices that are part and parcel of this society.

Indeed, the condition of the penal system of the United States and of Alabama, in particular, is shameful. It is bad enough that men and women, most of whom are poor, most of whom have committed crimes against property in order to survive, or who have committed no crimes at all, are crowded into cages and divested of any control over their lives -- the mere act of turning on a light bulb is denied them. But prisoners are also physically isolated from their families; they are reduced to the economic status of serfs who are forced to engage in the harshest manual labor which supplies no skills that are marketable in the outside world and which offers virtually no monetary compensation. And those prisoners who stand up for the most basic human rights must expect exposure to barbaric forms of torture ranging from total isolation, to being made guinea pigs for bizarre and debilitating medical experiments, to subjection to chemically induced castration and powerful mind-destroying tranquilizers, to vicious beatings and killings by guards who are rewarded for such behavior. It must not be forgotten that Black people, who constitute the most oppressed element of society on the outside, are within the prison walls subjected not only to the most rabid expressions of racism, but to dehumanizing conditions that far exceed the indignities heaped on most white inmates.

Prisons ostensibly constitute America's most savage institutions; yet one must ask whether this state of affairs is accidental, and one must consider whether prison life is nothing more extreme than an intensified version of the way millions of Americans must live -- deprived of adequate wages, medical care, and living conditions -- deprived of the power to control their own destinies.

RECENT EVENTS

The reaction to this intensely depressive penal system has been an even more intense, and courageous, organizing effort. In 1972, Alabama prisoners organized into the Inmates for Action (IFA), a group that conducted classes in technical skills, politics, and self-perception; a group that challenged prison authorities every inch of the way; a group that refused to be degraded and dehumanized. The result has been the recent murders of three IFA leaders, the frameup trials of nine others who call themselves the Atmore-Holman Brothers, and mass repression against all who identify with the IFA. The Brothers, in the face of this repression, grow stronger and are continuing and expanding organizing efforts each day.

OUR WORK

In light of the foregoing analysis, and in response to the struggle of the IFA and the state's reaction to this struggle, CPSB participates in a wide range of activities. We work to:

1. Support the IFA in all possible ways and work along with it in an effort to implement the demands and program of the IFA.

(OVER)

2. Provide legal support to those behind the walls and those fighting on the outside against imprisonment.
3. Provide transportation to the far away prisons (All Alabama prisons are far away from Birmingham.) for friends, supporters, and families.
4. Encourage as many people as possible to educate themselves about the nature of prisons by:
 - a. Writing Alabama prisoners.
 - b. Reading books such as Soledad Brother by George Jackson, The Autobiography of Malcolm X, Kind and Usual Punishment by Jessica Mitford, and Scottsboro Boy (the autobiography of Heywood Patter-son).
 - c. Working with ex-inmates and families of inmates.
5. Provide minimal needs to Alabama prisoners such as books, stamps, writing paper, soap, toothpaste, etc. (Alabama prisoners are paid 25¢ a week and are expected to buy all of the above, and more, with this 25¢.)
6. Publish a regularly appearing CPSB Newsletter which tells the truth about the Alabama prisons, and give Alabama inmates a chance to be heard.

If this work interests you, join it. Write: CPSB, P.O. Box 955, Birmingham, Ala-
bama 35201, for more information, for subscriptions to our CPSB Newsletter, and to
send contributions.

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