

# POLITICAL WOMEN PRISONERS IN THE U.S.



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NOTE--The information about the Lexington Control Unit was taken mainly from an unpublished article by Gwen and from the Background Information Packet put out by the Out of Control Committee to Shut Down Control Units in San Francisco.

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written and produced by Revolting Lesbians, July 1987, Bay Area, California.

*We are considering doing an update on this publication within a few months. If you have information that you believe should be included, please write to us at: the Women's Building, 3543 18th Street, San Francisco, CA 94110, c/o the Committee to Shut Down the Lexington Control Unit, Box 30.*

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## Introduction

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We are Revolting Lesbians. We will be talking this evening about a number of different women political prisoners who have a range of political viewpoints. The members of our group also have a range of political viewpoints. We are not asking you to agree with the politics of all the prisoners we are discussing. We *do* think that we all need to know what happens to political women prisoners in this country and support them in their struggles against the criminal injustice system.

Prisons are perhaps the most obvious examples of total institutions, places where people are locked up because other people decide they should be removed from society.

Other examples include juvenile detention centers, psychiatric hospitals, deportation and relocation centers, residential schools for physically and developmentally disabled people, and nursing homes. All of these are places where the people who live there lose control over such decisions as when they sleep, what they eat, how they dress, and who they associate with. Physical and sexual abuse are rampant within total institutions, including behavior modification, forced drugging, rape, sensory deprivation, electroshock, psychosurgery, and sterilization. People who live in such institutions, whether they are called inmates, residents, students, or patients are in fact imprisoned and in this talk we will use the word "prisoners" to refer to all of them.

Total institutions exaggerate societal racism, classism, and lesbophobia. Women of color, poor women, and lesbians are disproportionately incarcerated and singled out for worse treatment than

straight, white, middle and upper class women within these institutions. Women who cannot or will not conform to prevailing standards of physical attractiveness: fat women, butches, visibly disabled women, are punished for their appearance. Similarly, women who, due to religious or political convictions, cultural traditions, or simple survival tactics, are said to "exhibit behaviors" not in line with prevailing standards of femininity and are condemned for their "bad attitudes." Women who assert their sexual autonomy, be they lesbians, prostitutes, or celibate, are judged sick, crazy, and noncompliant.

All women experience sexism in their encounters with institutions. The fact that women labeled deviant are more frequently locked up in psychiatric hospitals than prisons is a function of the sexist tracking system operating within society. Some women spend long periods of their lives in two or more kinds of institutions. For instance, if you're a prisoner in a residential school and you're judged to be in sufficiently bad health, the authorities may transfer you to a hospital. If it's your thoughts that are judged bad, you could get locked up in a psychiatric hospital. If it's your actions that the authorities think are bad, you might wind up in juvenile hall or jail. In all cases, you are a prisoner, and you do not get out until someone other than yourself certifies you as being good enough—in health, thoughts, and actions—to be free.

It is in the interests of the state to keep prisoners and ex-prisoners of the various institutions divided from each other. We are taught to think, "Well, at least I'm not criminal, crazy, crippled, senile," in order to feel a little better about ourselves. What's important is how institutions work together

keeping us separate and obedient in order to avoid getting locked up.

And within institutions there is usually some version of "lock down," that functions as the iron fist of behavior modification, a warning that no matter how much you're being shit on, it could always get worse.

Again, tonight's presentation will be focused most specifically on women political prisoners. Tonight we will mostly be using the conventional definition of a political prisoner, which is somebody who is in prison or held in unusual conditions because of their self-conscious political acts or a person who is in prison as part of the government's attempt to suppress or destroy a movement. It is right that the movement should pay special attention to its members who have been singled out by the state. However, in another sense, all prisoners are political because the laws and the courts in this country are completely political and not at all fair. Also, as Revolting Lesbians, we believe that all women who are in prison are there for political reasons, either economic (like prostitution or theft) or for defending ourselves or our children.

Under the Geneva Convention, political prisoners, like prisoners of war, are guaranteed privileges not granted to so-called "common criminals" (people who "break laws" for reasons other than political motivation—i.e. economic). A number of countries, including the U.S., deny political prisoner status, preferring instead to prosecute on criminal charges. This deligitimizes the politics of an individual's action, and avoids bad international press and the Geneva Convention guarantees. The blame for the crime falls onto the individual or group rather than the state.

In the Lexington Control Unit, which we'll tell you more about later, the intent is clearly and overtly political. The women there are revolutionaries whose actions have been criminalized by the state. These three women, who "happen to be" a disabled Puerto Rican nationalist, a non-U.S. citizen, and a Jew, have been subjected to psychological, physical, and sexual torture in an effort to make them renounce their political convictions and snitch on their comrades. The abuse continues. Lexington Control Unit is also designed to serve as a "deterrent" to political dissent, a warning of what might happen to any of us who get too far out of line.

The state protects its interests by calling rebellion criminal and crazy. We as Revolting Lesbians see it in our interest to learn more about the women whose resistance continues behind bars, protest the abuses they are subjected to, and bring their struggles to our communities.

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## Locked away—women in U.S. prisons

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### OVERVIEW

**Rate of imprisonment.** The United States has the second highest rate of imprisonment in the world, based on those countries for which statistics are available, and imprisons more people per capita than any other industrialized western nation.

**Length of sentences.** The United States follows only two nations—the Soviet Union and South Africa—in the average length of time served in prison. In contrast, most western nations prescribe short prison stays: an average of 40 days in the Netherlands, for instance, compared to

the U.S. average of 22 months.<sup>1</sup>

**The death penalty.** Every Western industrial nation, except the United States, has stopped executing prisoners, either by legally banning execution, or else by simply not using it as a sentence. By contrast, countries generally representative of human rights, such as South Africa, have kept punishment by death.<sup>2</sup>

### WHAT DOES PRISON COST?

In addition to causing an enormous waste of human potential; prisons absorb huge amounts of money. For instance:

- In 1980, it cost an average of \$13,000 per year per prisoner to keep people in jail. The income of the average American family during that same time was approximately \$16,000.
- As of 1980, the government was spending about \$50,000 per cell to build prisons and jails.
- Recently, there has been an increasing emphasis on getting "tough on crime." This has caused overcrowding and increased prison construction, turning "prison costs into the fastest growing major expense in the [California] state government...the corrections budget could soon begin to strip money from education and health and welfare programs."<sup>3</sup>

In fact, over the past several years there have already been extensive cuts in funds for

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<sup>1</sup> *Willamette Valley Observer*, March 12, 1981.

<sup>2</sup> *Capital Punishment and the American Agenda*, Hawkins and Zimring, Cambridge University Press, 1987.

<sup>3</sup> *Women's jail afflicted by overcrowding*, McClatchy News Service, March 22, 1987.

education, unemployment, Medical, and Aid to Families with Dependent Children both nationally and at the state level. California, which spends a smaller percentage of its budget on education than *any other* state in the nation, has the nation's largest prison system.

### WOMEN IN U.S. PRISONS—WHO'S WHO

**Racial distribution.** Women of color are imprisoned in rates disproportionate to their numbers in society as a whole. For instance, although Black women represent less than 12 percent of the female adult population in the United States, a 1982 study showed that approximately 46 percent of prisoners were Black.

### Economic backgrounds.

According to one study, 70% of *all* pre-trial prisoners were unemployed at the time of arrest. More than 30% had been unemployed for more than one year.

Although the connection between poverty and imprisonment exists for the prison population as a whole, it is a particular issue for women. Two out of three adults living in poverty in America are women, and statistics show that poverty and crimes of survival lead many women to prison. For instance:

- Between 70 and 80 percent of women in prison come from impoverished backgrounds; 50 percent are between the ages of 22 and 30; 24 percent are married, and between 60 and 70 percent have children.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Statistics compiled by the National Council on Crime and Delinquency. Quoted in *The Christian Science Monitor*, October 28, 1982.

The high percentage of inmates who are single mothers is especially significant, since studies have shown that most women are in prison for crimes related to their inability to provide for their families. For example, 92%<sup>5</sup> of women are in prison for non-violent "crimes," many of which are related to economic survival, such as forgery, counterfeiting, stolen property, gambling, drugs, and prostitution.

### **Abused women fighting back.**

As many as 1,000 women a year are imprisoned in the U.S. for murder or manslaughter because they killed an abusing husband or boyfriend. Often these women were in fear for their own lives or those of their children; nonetheless, 75 to 90 percent of the women who kill their batterers are convicted even when evidence of abuse is admitted.<sup>6</sup> A 1984 Denver, Colorado, study found that women are more likely to be charged with first or second degree murder for killing a man they know than men are for killing a woman they know. The women also face much harsher sentences than the men.<sup>7</sup>

**Lesbians in prison.** One of the forms of oppression lesbians face in society in general is invisibility: a denial of our very existence. This oppression extends to incarceration: we could not find any statistics about the numbers or treatment of lesbians in prison. We do know that in 1986 Amnesty International conducted a survey of lesbians and gay men in prison, looking at such questions as the numbers of gay inmates, the kind

of treatment accorded them, and the amount of time served. Some people believe that lesbians and gay men serve longer sentences than heterosexual prisoners, and this is one of the questions the survey was trying to answer. We do not yet have the results of this survey.

Although harassment in prison is often spontaneous, it sometimes takes the form of formal rules. In Oregon, lesbian and gay male inmates who kissed or embraced visitors of the same sex. were punished and written up. This practice, which did not apply to heterosexual inmates, was challenged by an inmate, Welsey Johnson, represented by the American Civil Liberties Union. According to the 1987 court ruling, "gay and lesbian prisoners will no longer receive punishment for physical contact with same sex visitors, nor will the contact be entered into the prisoners' official record."<sup>8</sup>

### **QUALITY OF LIFE**

What is life like for women living in U.S. prisons? Women live in overcrowded conditions, often in prisons so far removed from their homes that it is difficult for their families to visit them. They are given inadequate medical care and job training, are more often sedated than their male counterparts, and are subject to sexual harassment by prison authorities.

**Location.** Studies, as well as common sense, tell us that it is important for women in prison to maintain contact with their families, both in order to cope as well as possible with the institutionalization, and in order to succeed in society after their release from prison. Yet a study done by the

U.S. Bureau of Prison revealed that women inmates receive fewer visits than men, even when the distance between home and the institution is the same.

In addition, women's prisons are often built in remote areas, far from metropolitan areas (large numbers of women prisoners come from metropolitan areas). Often public transportation does not go close enough to the prison, making it very difficult for families without cars to visit at all. In addition, children who are separated from their mothers during their mother's imprisonment have a higher incidence of problems than children who can maintain closer contact with their mothers.

**Medical care.** Medical care in prisons is often lacking, and according to a report by the U.S. Justice Department, the medical care at Vacaville, the nation's largest prison, constitutes cruel and unusual punishment. The Department's investigation found "severe shortages of medical and psychiatric staff, failure to provide timely treatment,...inmates involved in operating-room procedures, unsanitary conditions and extreme overcrowding."<sup>9</sup> Vacaville is not the only prison with such problems: in California, only one prison hospital, the one in San Quentin, has ever been properly licensed by the state Department of Health Services—and San Quentin lost their hospital license in 1986 after it failed a Department of Health Services inspection. And it was necessary for a class-action suit to be filed so that pregnant women and new mothers at CIW-Frontera could receive adequate prenatal and postpartum care. The

<sup>9</sup> "Prison health care called cruel and unusual punishment," *San Francisco Examiner*, June 14, 1987.

<sup>5</sup> *Connexions* magazine, fall 1984.

<sup>6</sup> *Battered Women Who Kill: Psychological Self-Defense as a Legal Justification*, Ewing, 1987.

<sup>7</sup> *Washington Post*, April 21, 1987.

<sup>8</sup> *Off Our Backs*, Vol. 12, No. 1, spring, 1987.

settlement requires that every pregnant and new mother prisoner be seen regularly by a gynecologist and a nurse practitioner; it also sets guidelines for medical tests, nutrition and identification of high-risk mothers.

Women entering prison often have a variety of health problems. And they often receive even worse medical care than male inmates. One reason given is that, since women comprise such a small percentage of the population of incarcerated adults, medical services are not designed to meet their needs. However, when prison authorities want to provide "specialized medical care" for women they are able to do so: women inmates are two to three times more likely to be prescribed psychiatric drugs such as Thorazine, Haldol, and Prolixin, than male inmates, even when both are housed in the same prison. These drugs can impair cognitive and physical functions, permanent damage to the nervous system, and even death.

#### **Medical care and pregnancy.**

According to a 1985 study by Prison Match (Programs for Children and Inmate Parents), about one quarter of the 464 women studied were currently or recently pregnant. Less than half of these pregnancies ended in live births: 33.6 percent ending in miscarriages as compared with 31.7 percent of abortions. The rate of miscarriages in the general population is about 15 percent, the rate of congenital disabilities is about 2 percent (the *Harvard Medical School Health Letter*, 1983).

According to the Prison Match study, 61 percent of pregnancies had complications. One third of the infants born had health problems at birth or shortly thereafter. The pregnant women's need for a healthy diet, fresh air, and exercise

were not adequately addressed. Emergency medical care was physically inaccessible, geographically distant, and available only through time-consuming and cumbersome security measures (such as guarding and shackling laboring women.) Infants are separated from their mothers after only one or two days, before critical mother/infant bonding can be completed. If a mother is not released from prison within one year, she will most likely lose custody of her child permanently.

Remember that many women are in prison for "crimes" related to trying to support their children!

#### **Sexual harrassment.**

"Women in prison have reported incidents of sexual harrassment by male correctional staff. Coercion and intimidation are used to manipulate women, as are promises of preferential treatment. Strip searches of female inmates are usually performed by female staff, but male guards are often not far enough out of viewing range to ensure privacy.

Similar to the response to rape victims in the free world, there is a tendency among correctional officials to blame the victims of sexual harrassment. Most often the charges are denied."

Says Susan Rosenberg, a political prisoner serving a 58-year sentence, "Sexual threats and sexism as a weapon are rampant in the prisons as a whole. It is an underpinning of the institutional policies of the BOP. It is encouraged and applauded by the administration and by the guards. One regulation says that male guards can pat search a woman prisoner at any time. In an "emergency" situation, a male guard can strip search a woman prisoner. Defining emergency situations is left up to the individual discretion of the guard."

**Overcrowding.** California's prison system is the nation's largest, and includes 63,600 inmates. As in many other parts of the country, overcrowding in California prisons is severe. Vacaville, which is the nation's largest prison, was designed for 4,730 prisoners but houses 8,216.<sup>10</sup>

In the California Institution for Women, California's only all-female prison, the following conditions exist:<sup>11</sup>

- 32 women living in two rooms, sharing one toilet and one sink
- filthy bathrooms
- no place to exercise (the gym has been converted to a dorm)
- 238 women sharing two telephones.

Withdrawal is a typical way for women to cope in overcrowded prisons. Unlike some male inmates in similar situations, women "don't flood their cells, they don't set fire to their mattresses, and they don't join gangs or wage bloody warfare."<sup>12</sup> As a result, in the push for better prison conditions, women get mostly overlooked.

**Job training.** Particularly since many women become prisoners due to crimes of survival, they are interested in obtaining education and job training while incarcerated. However, there are even fewer such programs available for women than for men inside. This is a problem nationwide. In 1982, the *Christian Science Monitor* reported that women inmates in

<sup>10</sup> "Prison health care called cruel and unusual punishment," *San Francisco Examiner*, June 14, 1987.

<sup>11</sup> *Women's jail afflicted by overcrowding*, McClatchy News Service, March 22, 1987.

<sup>12</sup> *Women's jail afflicted by overcrowding*, McClatchy News Service, March 22, 1987.

Boston had only two vocational training programs to choose from, leading to average annual salaries of \$11,846. Men had access to training in 14 trades with average annual salaries of \$16,726. Women inmates were earning up to \$1.25 per day for prison maintenance jobs, versus \$2.25 for men inmates.

The fact that all inmates, and especially women, are not given appropriate training is especially ironic, because the cost of sending someone to prison for a year equals the cost of sending a student to Harvard University—\$17,256 per year. Within four years, prison officials say, the cost will rise to \$25,000.<sup>13</sup>

### INCREASING PRISON POPULATION

Considering the appalling conditions women live under in prison, it is especially discouraging to realize that the number of women incarcerated has been steadily rising. In the nine years between 1974 and 1983, the number of women in U.S. prisons increased by 133%. During that same period, the number of men in prison increased by 86%.<sup>14</sup>

These incarceration rates are linked to economics. "The number of poor families increased little between 1969 and 1978, but the composition of this group changed markedly. During that time the number of poor families headed by women increased by one-third. Families with female heads have a poverty rate six times

that of male-headed families." This trend did not end in 1978 or 1983: the U.S. Department of Justice noted in 1986 that although women comprise 4.8 percent of the total U.S. prison population, the number of women prisoners continues to grow at a rate faster than that of male inmates: 8.9 percent versus 4.9 percent for the first six months of 1986.<sup>15</sup>

In California, which already has the most overcrowded prison system in the nation, the number of all inmates is expected to double by 1995.<sup>16</sup> The population of women is expected to continue to grow at a disproportionate rate.

### POLITICAL PRISONERS

**Overview.** "Some countries have high rates of political prisoners—people who are imprisoned because of their political beliefs and may have committed a crime as a result of these beliefs. Under the Geneva Convention, political prisoners, like prisoners of war, are guaranteed privileges that so-called common criminals (people who "break laws" for reasons other than political motivation, i.e. economic) are not. A number of countries, including the U.S., deny political prisoner status, preferring instead to prosecute on criminal charges. This delegitimizes the politics of an individual's action, and avoids bad international press and the Geneva Convention guarantees. The blame for the crime falls onto the individual or group rather than the state."<sup>17</sup>

"The political trial has throughout history been the tool of the government, the stage upon which it demonstrates what it will tolerate and what it will crush, the

blackboard on which it draws the line that it dares us to cross. The political trial has also, therefore, served as the crucible within which all political movements have had to test their strength, determine their direction, and come out on one side or the other."<sup>18</sup>

**In the U.S.** The U.S. government denies that there are any political prisoners within this country; however, at this time, there are over 100 self-defined political prisoners and prisoners of war in the U.S. At least 25% of these are women.

**Harrassment.** These women are subject to the same kinds of harrassment and lack of care as other incarcerated women. In many cases the harrassment is intensified in order to try to break the spirit of these political prisoners. Women at the Lexington Control Unit are subjected to repeated vaginal and rectal "searches" by male guards, are strip searched every time they leave and re-enter their cells, are denied interaction with other prisoners, denied visits by anyone other than family members and attorneys, and are under continuous video and guard surveillance. Medical care is withheld at the will of the prison authorities, e.g., Alejandrina Torres, a Puerto Rican nationalist currently held at Lexington, suffered from heart palpitations for weeks, but was told she was "too much of a security risk" to be taken to the infirmary and treated. (Alejandrina has a history of heart problems.)

**Conclusion.** Following are short biographies of some of the individual women currently in U.S. prisons who are, by their own

<sup>13</sup> *Women's jail afflicted by overcrowding*, McClatchy News Service, March 22, 1987.

<sup>14</sup> *The Washington Post Magazine*, January 15, 1984. This article was quoting a study done by the U.S. Census Bureau for the Bureau of Justice Statistics.

<sup>15</sup> *Bulletin*, U.S. Department of Justice, September 14, 1986.

<sup>16</sup> *S.F. Chronicle*, December 9, 1986.

<sup>17</sup> From *Through the Looking Glass*.

<sup>18</sup> Susan Saxe.



description, political prisoners. Says one, Silvia Baraldini, who is currently serving a 43 year sentence for charges of conspiracy (under RICO) and incarcerated at Lexington Control Unit:

*I cannot stress enough the importance of keeping the work going. The people in charge are going to respond only to increased pressure...the issue of political prisoners must be raised. This is the reason why we have been sent here and this is the reason the conditions are so harsh. Everything is aimed at isolating us from the struggle outside.*

## REMEMBER OUR SISTERS INSIDE!

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## Some individual stories

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The following pages give information about individual women now being held in U.S. prisons for political "crimes." This information is not always easy to find, and so the stories are often incomplete.

Where we can, we have given information about the women's backgrounds, politics, and their current place of imprisonment and their sentences. Whenever possible, we have used the women's own words and own definitions of themselves.

This list includes three "out" lesbians; we know there are more. We wish to express our support and respect for women who are open about their lesbian identity, despite the difficulties of being "out" in prison. For those who are not "out" at this time, we regret the circumstances that cause this to be true.

We have listed people alphabetically, either by their own first names, or, in some cases, by the group they are part of.

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### Alejandrina Torres

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Alejandrina Torres is a Puerto Rican Prisoner of War born in San Lorenzo, Puerto Rico on June 18, 1939. She was the ninth of ten children. Her father died shortly after her birth, causing her mother to work outside the home to provide for them. Her mother's failing health forced the Fernandez family to move to New York, where Alejandrina graduated from high school. In 1963, after working in church as a volunteer for a period of time, she moved to Chicago, where she met and married Reverend Jose Alberto Torres, who also shared her deep commitment

to social justice.

Together they raised five children. In 1965, Alejandrina became a member of the First Congregational Church, where she continued working for quality education, and providing social services to help alleviate the worsening economic conditions of the Puerto Rican community. In 1972, Alejandrina, along with other community activists, founded the Rafael Cancel Miranda Puerto Rican High School (today known as Dr. Pedro Albizu Campos) and Betances Clinic in 1977. She helped set up a Puerto Rican cultural center that houses a child care center, museum, a 10,000 volume library, and an award-winning high school, all of which refuse government funds. Following Alejandrina's arrest, the FBI attempted to destroy the center by smashing its computers, stealing membership lists, and trying to convince the community it was a terrorist school. Two years later, the high school received the Department of Education's award for being the best alternative high school in the country.

Alejandrina was captured on June 29, 1983, along with other comrades, and immediately assumed Prisoner of War status. Her arrest followed a two-year investigation by 110 FBI agents who illegally installed video cameras in every room of an alleged F.A.L.N. safe house. She is presently serving a sentence of 35 years for charges of seditious conspiracy. (Until recently, the charge of seditious conspiracy had been levelled only against the Puerto Rican Independence Movement—in 1937, 1955, 1981, 1982, and 1983. Recently it has also been levelled against members of the Ohio 7.)

Alejandrina has continually been sexually abused and tortured: she has been housed in an all

men's unit; forcibly strip-searched by male guards; and given forced vaginal and rectal searches by male physicians' assistants.

Alejandrina was transferred to the Lexington Control Unit in October 1986 and is currently imprisoned there. She says, "The example of women's commitment is rooted in the ability to teach and to learn, but most importantly, to carry out our tasks unrelentlessly."

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### Judy Clarke

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Judy Clarke had been active for years in civil rights work, the Weather Underground, and SDS. She was given a sentence of 75 years to life with no chance of parole for the October 20, 1981 attempted Brinks' expropriation. She is currently at Bedford in New York, where she has been in isolation for 20 months. In 1984, as she was leaving a visit in prison, the guards handcuffed her and then put her in segregation. After this, she was given written notice that she was charged with with "conspiracy to escape." She will be in isolation for another four months. She writes "The length of my sentence is *unprecedented* here at Bedford. Women who actually escaped and were later found spend six months to a year in segregation—the only reason I got two years is that I am a revolutionary political prisoner who the state wants to isolate from other prisoners and from the struggle outside." (*The Insurgent*, February 1985.)

Judy Clarke is a mother who believes "every child on this earth has a birthright that is being held hostage by this imperialist system." She is also an open lesbian who writes "Yes,...I am definitely out as a lesbian. It's part of my identity as a person and a woman, so of course as a revolutionary and

political prisoner." (from private correspondence, May 1987.)

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### Kathy Boudin

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In the 1960's Kathy Boudin worked as a welfare-rights organizer, and as an organizer for Students for a Democratic Society doing anti-war and anti-draft work. She went underground in 1969 because of her opposition to the war in Viet Nam and the repression of the Black movement. In her own words, "As a white woman, I did not want the crimes committed against Black people to be done in my name. Looking at the history of the U.S., I saw the Black freedom movement as both a way of providing fundamental justice for Black people and a key to bringing change to the whole country. I was inspired by the example of abolitionist women and the underground railroad."

Kathy went underground for 12 years. On October 20, 1981, she was arrested during an attempt to seize money from a Brinks' armored truck to support the Black liberation struggle and its underground movement. After nearly three years of pre-trial incarceration (almost all of it isolated from other prisoners), Kathy pled guilty to one count of robbery and one count of felony murder and was sentenced in 1984 to 25 years to life.

She is now incarcerated at Bedford Hills, New York, where she arranged for the play "For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide When the Rainbow is Enuf" to be put on, despite great difficulties. She has also been active in protesting mandatory AIDS testing of prisoners.

Kathy's son Chesa was born while she was underground. She writes, "I want him, and all the

children, to grow up in a society that uses its vast wealth and resources for building institutions that foster life: schools and hospitals as opposed to prisons, nuclear weapons, pellet bombs, and chemical pollution; a society that provides jobs for life instead of the means of death."

Kathy writes, "I don't like being in jail. No one does. But the meaning of my life has come from being part of a world-wide tradition of fighting for a more just and humane world. My ideals give me strength today, as well as yesterday and tomorrow."<sup>19</sup>

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### Laura Whitehorn

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Laura Whitehorn was born in Brooklyn in 1945. She says, "I learned [the important things] from the streets of New Rochelle, New York, where I grew up seeing segregation and racism, and hating that; experiencing disrespect and limitations put on me as a young woman, and hating that; living amidst amerikkan arrogance, white supremacy, and hypocrisy, and hating these things.

The important lessons came from the courage, determination, and dignity of Black people marching for Civil Rights. ...The lessons came from national liberation struggles in 1969: Vietnam, Latin America, the Black Power movement here....It meant fighting...As a woman and a lesbian, I've continued to fight that system: doing many kinds of political work: seizing a Harvard building on International Women's Day in 1971; building a women's school in Boston; helping Black families defend their homes from racist attack in

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<sup>19</sup> From *Friends of Kathy Boudin* newsletter.

Boston in the 70's; fighting against the KKK; solidarity with Zimbabwe, Puerto Rico, and the Black/New Afrikan struggle for land and independence; and building clandestine revolutionary resistance so we can help win the freedom and justice humanity longs for. I was arrested in May, 1985, and held in preventive detention, and I face a variety of charges in Baltimore and New York."<sup>20</sup>

Laura was arrested with Marilyn Buck (see below), May 11, 1985, when a dozen FBI agents broke into a Baltimore, Maryland apartment. In 1986, Laura was held in *total isolation* for four months at Alderson federal prison, in Virginia. She was out of isolation briefly around the time of a hearing, then back in, and was also moved to the Metropolitan Correctional Center (MCC) during 1986. In all, she spent the better part of a year in isolation...outrageous conditions for any prisoner, but in Laura's case, also an attempt by the government to set a precedent of holding *pre-trial* prisoners in "high security" conditions simply because the *are* political prisoners.

Laura was moved four times to disrupt any legal and political work around her case. The U.S. Marshall's Service rationalized these moves by "security demands." Laura Whitehorn is now in the Federal Correction Institute (Pleasanton prison) in California.

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<sup>20</sup> From *Women Political Prisoners and Prisoners of War*, by the Committee to Fight Repression, New York, New York.

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### Linda Evans

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Linda Evans has been part of a variety of political struggles, working as a campus organizer for SDS in Michigan in support of the Vietnamese Liberation struggle and the Black Liberation Movement in the U.S., and fighting against the Ku Klux Klan and against forced sterilization. She lived on women's land in Texas and Arkansas that had to be abandoned when the land was defoliated with Agent Orange by the National Forest Service. She was a member of an all women's political band, Jubilee, in Austin, Texas, and established a women's printing collective to train women in printing and the graphic arts. She has worked with the Central America solidarity movement, and has raised material aid for a women's school in Zimbabwe run by the ZANU Women's League. She helped build support for the New Afrikan/Black Prisoners-of-War and for the right of these colonized nations to self-determination. She went underground to help develop the clandestine resistance movement.<sup>21</sup>

Linda was captured with Marilyn Buck on May 11, 1985, and charged with harboring Marilyn in New York and Connecticut, as well as with possession of a gun and false i.d. She was held on \$500,000 bail, despite the fact that she was facing only ten years in jail at the time of the hearing. In 1986, the FBI dropped the charges of harboring Marilyn Buck. However, since the government needed an indictment, their next step was to convene a grand jury to gather more evidence.

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<sup>21</sup> Information in this paragraph from *Women Political Prisoners and Prisoners of War*, by the Committee to Fight Repression, New York, New York.

Linda was recently sentenced to 40 years in prison, based on weapons charges—illegal possession and purchase. Each charge carries a ten-year maximum sentence—the state ran the sentences together in order to get a 40-year sentence.

Linda writes,

*As women, as lesbians, we will have to fight to win our liberation. National liberation struggles have defeated our common enemy—U.S. imperialism—by using all forms of resistance, including armed struggle. It is in socialist societies where the greatest advances for Women's Liberation, and an end to lesbian oppression and racism have been made. So, I believe we need to fight for socialist revolution, struggling in solidarity with these liberation movements.*

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#### **Marilyn Buck**

Marilyn writes of herself, "I am a white woman born in Texas into a segregated society. I grew up not knowing Black people or Mexicano people. My father became deeply involved in the civil rights struggle. I did not, until I realized my own oppression as a woman, at home, at school, and in all the limitations we face. The contradiction of my own oppression as a woman and my privilege as a white person in Amerika led me to become involved in revolutionary struggle. I realized that the liberation of colonized peoples was integral to the liberation of women. I was greatly influenced by Third World women who have played a key role in the national liberation struggles of their nations."<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> *Women Political Prisoners and Prisoners of War*. Committee to Fight Repression. New York, New York.

Marilyn was originally arrested in 1973 and was charged with buying ammunition for the Black Liberation Army (BLA). She escaped from Federal custody in 1977 and remained underground until recaptured May 11, 1985. She has received a five-year sentence for escape and is still awaiting trial for violating the RICO conspiracy laws, allegedly taking part in liberating Assata Shakur from Clinton Prison, and several expropriations in the New York area, including the October 20, 1981 attempted Brinks' expropriation.

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#### **MOVE**

MOVE is a predominantly Black group of human and animal liberationists who advocate revolution for the purpose of "clearing up life" and follow the teachings of Coordinator John Africa.

Although MOVE's anti-gay politics are certainly not progressive, it is racism that has been the motivation behind their persecution by government officials. Practically since its inception in 1972 in Philadelphia, MOVE members have been jailed on charges ranging from dog-license violations to Murder One. While in jail, MOVE women have been medically quarantined, denied access to their religion, shackled during labor, beaten, denied exercise, and placed in solitary confinement. Nevertheless, their indomitable and unrepentant spirit of rebellion continues. Debbie Africa, Alberta Africa Sue Africa, Janine Africa, Merle Africa, and Janet Africa were imprisoned after the City of Philadelphia laid siege to their house on August 8, 1978. In the attack, a firefighter was shot. The cops subsequently razed the house, destroying all physical evidence.

With the exception of Consuswella Africa, who was found guilty of criminal conspiracy, and five counts of simple assault, the MOVE women were found guilty of murder and sentenced to 30 to 100 years each. All of the MOVE women are imprisoned at Pennsylvania State Women's Prison in Muncy.

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#### **Alberta Africa**

Alberta was previously arrested (1975) for protesting medical treatment forced on imprisoned MOVE members that violated their religious beliefs. While in custody, cops held Alberta down, knowing she was pregnant, and kicked her in the vagina until she had a miscarriage. No cop was ever indicted.

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#### **Consuswella Africa**

Consuswella Africa was found guilty of criminal conspiracy and five counts of simple assault in connection with injuries suffered by officers and firefighters on August 8, 1978. She has been persistently harassed and persecuted by prison officials. They have prevented her from exercising, particularly important to Consuswella as a long-distance runner. She has been framed-up on prison infractions and placed in solitary.

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#### **Janet Africa**

Janet Africa writes "People have been misguided, tricked by this Rotten system, tricked into believe that this system works for them, tricked into thinkin' they got freedom, only to find out that the minute that people begin to speak

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freely and you talkin' about *this* govt. you aint no more. Then you get jumped, Beat, and locked up in jail, which crystallizes that aint no freedom in this system." Janet writes of her frustration with prison food, not considered edible by MOVE members, who are raw-food vegetarians, "Once a year this prison sells nuts, dried fruit, and cheese for Xmas. They've done it for the past two or three years, but we were in isolation and couldn't get the package." Janet had one daughter, killed in the May 13 massacre (see below). She concludes, "I have committed my life to John Africa's revolution."

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### Janine Africa

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Janine was the mother of Life Africa, the first child born to MOVE. In 1976, MOVE members released from prison were greeted back at their house by family members including Janine and infant Life. The neighbors phoned in a noise complaint and the cops came and beat MOVE members. The cops pushed Janine onto the ground as she was holding Life. Others were pushed on top of her and Life was crushed to death. Although there were several witnesses, the City of Philadelphia refused to investigate the case because MOVE would not give them Life's body for autopsy, since to do so would violate their religion.

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### Sue Africa

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Sue Africa has spent over three years in solitary confinement. She was the mother of Tomaso Africa, killed on May 13, 1985 (see following biography).

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### Ramona Africa

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On May 13, 1985, MOVE's home was again attacked, this time by hundreds of cops armed with water, tear gas, smoke, machine guns, rifles, shot guns, anti-tank guns, high-powered explosives, and bombs. In the following 90 minutes the cops shot 10,000 rounds of ammunition at the house and dropped a bomb on it from the air. Not one official has ever gone to prison for crimes against this family.

Ramona Africa is the only adult survivor of this attack which killed 11 MOVE family members, including children. She said of the massacre, "A number of officials are still tryin' to convince people that May 13 was just a 'bad day.' That's like Hitler tellin' people not to judge him by 'one mistake,' the Holocaust! The events of May 13 represent the results of *deliberate planning, survelling, photographing, interviewing*. Tryin' to pass the horror of May 13 off as a 'bad day' is like tryin' to pass off slavery as a bad investment."

Ramona was charged with 21 counts, including assaulting police. Ramona functioned as her own attorney, appearing in court in manacles, and countered with charges against the city. In the judges' chambers, outside the presence of the jury, the cops all took the Fifth Amendment before Ramona could ask a single question. In the courtroom, Ramona was not allowed to take off her jacket, because it would make the burn scars on her arms visible. When the trial ended in 1986, Ramona was found guilty of riot and conspiracy, and sentenced to 16 months to 7 years.

At her sentencing, Ramona said, "I was sentenced when my skin was burned off my body, scarring me for life. I'm here simply

because I'm a MOVE member, and I survived." She added, "As long as people are wronged, resistance is inevitable."

Ramona missed her first scheduled parole board hearing because she was in punitive medical quarantine. She said of her subsequent hearings, "They told me I would have to agree *not* to associate with *any* MOVE person even if the MOVE person has never been arrested for anything. I would also have to agree not to visit any MOVE house. I'm being told to abandon my religion." Since this is unacceptable to Ramona, she has repeatedly been denied parole.

In addition to the other charges against her, the City of Philadelphia recently made Ramona a third-party defendant in a suit, by residents of Osage Avenue against the City of Philadelphia. The city wants to hold Ramona responsible for the fact that, after they bombed the MOVE house, and murdered her family, they let the fire burn out of control, destroying 60 houses in the Black neighborhood. Ramona is currently in lockdown.<sup>23</sup>

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### The Ohio 7

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The Ohio 7 are revolutionary North Americans captured in November 1984 in Ohio and April 1985 in Virginia. While facing numerous charges in various states, the 7 started trial on September 30 in the Brooklyn Federal Court,

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<sup>23</sup> Information in this section from the following sources: *Attention MOVE, this is America*, by Margot Harry; *Class Struggle Defense Notes*; *Worker's Vanguard*; *Philadelphia Inquirer*; *Philadelphia Daily News*; *Revolutionary Worker*; and *Hera*.

New York. The government charged them with conspiracy and ten armed actions against U.S. military facilities and recruiting offices, South African government offices, IBM, Union Carbide, Motorola, Honeywell, and G.E. corporations. These actions were claimed by the United Freedom Front in support of and in solidarity with the people of Azania and Central America and their struggles.

Of the Ohio 7, three are women. Following are descriptions of these women's lives and politics, in their own words.<sup>24</sup>

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**Barbara Curzi-Laaman**

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"The youngest of four children, I was born and raised in an Italian neighborhood in Boston. My parents worked in factories most of their lives; my mother as a seamstress, my father as a machine repairperson, cabinet maker, and vitamin salesperson. They taught us that everyone has a right and responsibility to their community and to themselves to develop to their fullest potential. While trying to do so I saw it was a privilege afforded to few.

As a mother of three small children, I saw that health and education resources were grossly limited. I saw racism, sexism and classism as the cause of disparities between the people of the poor and working communities. They fought among themselves over the crumbs—to worn down to go after the real cause of the problem.

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<sup>24</sup> These women are in prison in Hartford, Connecticut. They are being tried for seditious conspiracy; we do not yet know what kind of sentences they have received.

In the mid-70's as Boston exploded with racist violence I joined the Anti-racist Committee. Some of the necessary work in the community I was involved with was tenants rights work, women's self-health and abortion rights/birth control education, and the People's Rights Committee (welfare rights group). Through study groups, work in the health care field, especially in Italian and Spanish speaking communities, my eyes were open to the real cause of the problems. I became and will remain committed to ending the system that causes all the problems, the system based on exploitation and oppression. Whatever my conditions, I'll keep bright my vision and hopes and never stop working until we've built that better day."

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**Carol Savcier Manning**

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"I was born January 3, 1956, in Kezar Falls, Maine. I grew up in the country—in this town of only 400 people. I am the daughter of the woolen mill workers. My mother and father both worked in the woolen mills all their lives. My only formal education was to the tenth grade. In 1972, I met Tom and we married. I was only 17 years old. In 1973, I had my first child, Jeremy. Also at this time we moved to Portland, Maine, and became involved in a prison reform organization named SCAR. This is where I met Pat Gros and Ray LeVasseur.<sup>25</sup> I became involved in the Women's Movement and helped open a bookstore, Red Star North, which included a free-to-prisoners book program. During the time between

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<sup>25</sup> Editor's note: Patricia Gros and Ray LeVasseur have three children, Carmen, Simone, and Rosa.

1973 and 1975, a few of us grew together politically. We became targets of the pigs and were forced underground to do our work. I have been active in the underground for 10 years. During these years underground, I had two more children—Tamara, age 5, and Jonathan, age 3.

For my children and the children of the world, now and in the future, I have a commitment to see that U.S. imperialism is defeated."

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**Patricia Gros**

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"I am Patricia Gros, one of eight children raised in a small town on the eastern shore of Maryland. My father was in the Army for a number of years and my mother worked at factory and office jobs. The main contradiction I found in my life growing up was the obvious racism and the disparity between Blacks and whites, rich and poor. I remember vividly trying to make sense out of the blind hate which many white people felt towards Black people—struggling against the immovable position of race and economic oppression.

As a white working class woman, I realized it was my duty to work and organize against racism and sexism, the oppression of the people; refuse to tolerate this government's policies throughout the world in the name of the American people. I see Revolution as the only sensible way toward a better world for everyone.

I see the development of the Armed Revolutionary underground as an important and necessary step forward, an example from which to learn and build."

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## Puerto Rican POWs, Captured 1980

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### Alicia Rodriguez

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Alicia was born in Chicago, Illinois on October 21, 1953. She is the fourth of five children from a very close working class family. Her parents sacrificed much to send their children to catholic school. But even those schools provided little protection from racism. Alicia studied at the University of Illinois and received a Bachelor's degree in Biology.

She says, "I was definitely influenced by my family life and by the conditions that surrounded me. They both developed patriotic feelings in me, as well as love and respect for life. These experiences also awakened my defiance and pride in being a woman. They created rebelliousness in the face of the abuses and suffering of people around me."

She was captured on April 4, 1980 along with her sister and other comrades. She is serving a 30 year sentence at Dwight, Illinois. Then she has a federal sentence of 55 years for seditious conspiracy.

As a Puerto Rican Nationalist, she considers herself a Prisoner of War as defined by the Geneva convention.

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### Carmen Valentin

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Carmen was born in Arecibo, Puerto Rico on March 2, 1946, and moved to Chicago at the age of nine. She is the mother of a 17 year old son who is currently studying at DePaul University. Carmen graduated from North

Eastern University on Illinois with a Master's degree in Spanish. She was a teacher at Rafael Cancel Miranda Puerto Rican High School, and a leader in many strikes to change conditions for Latina students in Chicago's West Side.

Carmen did four years at Illinois Women's Prison at Dwight. Then she was moved to federal prison where she is serving a 95 year sentence for seditious conspiracy. She is currently at F.C.I. Pleasanton, California.

She says "...the word terrorist no longer means to the Puerto Rican nation what it used to. Instead of arousing fear or censure, terrorism is a call to action. To be called a terrorist by our enemy is an honor to any citizen...."

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### Dylcia Pagan-Morales

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Dylcia was born in "El Barrio" in New York on October 15, 1946. She studied Cinematography, and Sociology at Brooklyn College where she actively participated in the student struggles and was a founder of the Puerto Rican Students Union. She taught social studies in New York - ABC, NBC and CBS, and for the newspaper El Tiempo.

She was captured on April 4, 1980 together with other comrades. She is facing a federal sentence of 55 years for the charge of seditious conspiracy, along with others, after finishing a state sentence of eight years. Today she is imprisoned at FCI, Pleasanton, CA.

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### Haydee Torres

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Haydee Torres was born in Arecibo, Puerto Rico on June 27, 1955, and moved to Chicago at age 12. She studied at the University of Illinois where she was active in struggle for the rights of Latina students. Haydee was a founder of Rafael Cancel Miranda High School on Chicago's West Side.

Haydee was part of the 11 who were captured April 4, 1980. She was convicted by an all white jury for a F.A.L.N. bombing of Mobil Oil H Headquarters in New York and sentenced to life without possibility of parole. Haydee declared herself a Prisoner of War and turned her back on the court and spoke only to her supporters. She is now at Federal Correctional Institute Pleasanton, California.

Haydee gave birth to a daughter while underground. She has faced FBI beatings and harassment, several moves from prison to prison (including confinement in a control type unit), and the conscious medical neglect of a painful medical condition that prison doctors claim is precancerous.

She writes, "A free and struggling spirit cannot be broken. The enemy is amazed to see my calmness, my strength, my rage and my conviction in what I believe and live. ...this country (U.S.) does not know how to combat the revolutionary spirit of a people in arms."

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### Ida Luz Rodriguez

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Ida was born in Las Marias, Puerto Rico on July 7, 1950. At the age of two years, she moved to Chicago with her family. Her son, Damian is 14 years old and lives with his grandparents in Chicago. She studied at Northeastern

Illinois University, concentrating in the areas of Psychology and Sociology.

She began her political work in the Rafael Cancel Miranda Puerto Rican High School, today the Dr. Pedro Albizu Campos High School, and participated in the work of the Committee to Free the 5 Nationalists. In 1976 she was forced to go underground, and was captured, along with other comrades, on April 4, 1980. She is facing a federal sentence of 80 years for seditious conspiracy and other charges, after completing a state sentence of 8 years.

She writes, "Today I am a Prisoner of War. In reality this is the result of my participation in the clandestine armed struggle. Now I want to emphasize that my actions are not just reserved for exceptional people. I am not exceptional. But I am a woman who has been able to internalize and take actions for the truth - while capitalism/imperialism rules it endangers even the survival of life in all its forms."

Ida was held in a control unit upon entering the federal prison system, and is currently at FCI, Pleasanton, California.

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## Puerto Rican POWs Captured 1985

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### Ivonne Melendez

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Ivonne was born on December 2, 1954. She grew up and graduated from high school in Vega Baja, Puerto Rico. She studied at the University of Puerto Rico where she received a Bachelor's degree in Sociology with concentration in social welfare. She is a mother of three.

She has been accused of fraud and obstruction of commerce. Conviction could bring a 20 year sentence in federal prison.

Ivonne is one of the Puerto Rican 16 who were illegally arrested in August 1985 with raids in Puerto Rico by 200 FBI agents. She was brought to the United States and confined for over one year without possibility of bail (preventative detention is now legal in this country).

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### Luz Maria Berrios Berrios

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Lucy was born in Naranjito, Puerto Rico on March 5, 1949. She studied at the University of Puerto Rico in Rio Piedras where she graduated as an Occupational Therapist. It was here that she became aware and active in the struggle for a free Puerto Rico.

She worked at the "Hospital Industrial del Fondo de Seguro del Estado." She also worked as an independent therapist and in various print shops. Lucy is the mother of two children and faces federal charges that could result in a 50 year sentence.

Lucy is another of the Puerto Rican 16 who were arrested in Puerto Rico by 200 FBI agents. Under recently revised bail laws in the United States, she was held for over a year without possibility of parole in "preventative detention."

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### Plowshares

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"Plowshares" refers to several small groups of pacifists who take action against nuclear weapons. It is based on the Biblical statement about beating swords into plowshares and spears into pruning hooks. The "Plowshares 7" in

Oregon attacked a B52 bomber in 1983. In 1985, the "Silo Pruning Hooks," including two priests, a Native American activist, and Helen Woodson, a mother of 11, took an air-driven jackhammer and sledgehammers and did, according to the government, \$11,000 worth of damage to the lid of the missile silo. Helen Woodson and one of the priests received 18 years and 5 years probation, each. Larry Cloud Morgan, the Native American activist, received a 10-year sentence.

Helen got nine years for sabotaging national defense property, nine years for destroying government defense property, five years probation on conspiracy, and 6 months for trespassing. These are among the most severe sentences ever given for civil disobedience in this country. Helen writes of herself: "I am 44 years old and the mother of 11 children (one birth child, seven adopted, and three foster children). Ten of my children are mentally handicapped, and seven of them are still at home, ages 7 through 28.

I have been arrested about nine times for nuclear resistance, and have already spent 41 months in prison. I have no political orientation whatsoever, just Christian nonviolence. [I believe that the Plowshares] are only important insofar as we symbolize the potential for acting.

My present imprisonment is for the Silo Pruning Hooks action on November 12, 1984—the beginning disarmament of a Minuteman II missile silo in Missouri. The Minuteman will kill nine million people within 30 minutes if launched. We used jackhammers, sledge hammers, bolt cutters, etc., and poured seven pints of human blood on the silo lid.

My final release date is November 11, 2001. I could be



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released in November 1996 if I accept the court-ordered probation with promises never to break the law again, but I won't.

If there's anything I'd like for you to say, it's simply: Human beings constructed weapons of mass murder and human beings must de-construct them. Passing off our personal responsibility onto diplomats and governments is a cop-out."<sup>26</sup>

In the beginning of 1986, Jean Gump, a mother of 12, and four other Plowshares people broke into a Minuteman Missile sight at Witney Airforce Base, Missouri, and damaged the hatch covers on two missile silos while the crew from *60 Minutes* filmed them. She was convicted in September 1986 of conspiracy and destruction of national defense materials and was sentenced to six years. The latest address we have for her is Alderson Prison, in Virginia. She said, "Civil disobedience is a means of affecting change. We wanted to confront the system, and see if people really think disarmament is a crime."

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### Silvia Baraldini

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Born in Italy after World War II, Silvia suffered the effects of facism (her parents were not allowed to marry for seven years because her mother was not "pure Italian;" her father's uncle was killed in front of his children for being anti-fascist). Silvia immigrated to the United States and involved herself in the Civil Rights and peace movements in the 60's. As a result of seeing government repression of these movements through assassination and arbitrary arrest, Silvia says she

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<sup>26</sup> From private correspondence, June, 1987.

began to consider more radical options, eventually becoming a supporter of the Black Liberation Army (BLA), a clandestine force fighting for a Black nation in the deep South. She was originally held November 9, 1982 for refusing to testify before a grand jury (FBI agents had found a printed communique in Silvia's apartment from the FALN (Fuerzas Armadas de Liberacion Nacional)—a communique that was also mailed to 150 other addresses, including the *New York Times*). She was found guilty of criminal contempt for refusing to talk, and was later charged with aiding the prison escape of BLA member Assata Shakur (whom the FBI arrested under questionable circumstances).

On the testimony of two entries to the FBI's witness program, Silvia was convicted of conspiring to commit three holdups in Hartford Connecticut. The holdups never happened.

People who have met Silvia Baraldini say she conveys a sense of an immense generosity and an attractive, unhurried warmth. She is a devotee of yoga, and is currently imprisoned in the Lexington Control Unit.

A prisoner with a model record, Silvia had just been recommended for transfer to a *lighter security* facility by her evaluation team, when she was roused from her cell in the middle of the night on January 8, 1987, and transferred to the Lexington Control Unit.

Silvia is now serving 40 years for aiding and abetting a prison escape and for the three attempted holdups, and three more years for criminal contempt of a grand jury.

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### Susan Rosenberg

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Susan is a Northamerican anti-imperialist born in New York City in 1955. While still in high school, she worked with and was greatly influenced by the Young Lords Party and the Black Panther Party. In 1974, she traveled to Cuba to construct buildings, as part of the Venceremos Brigade in solidarity with the Cuban Revolution.

Susan worked for years in solidarity with the Puerto Rican Independence Movement, the New Afrikan Independence Movement, and other national liberation struggles. She is a Doctor of Acupuncture who studied with the New Afrikan acupuncturists at a revolutionary health center in Harlem, New York, that was dedicated to fighting the drug plague and providing community health care through acupuncture and Chinese medicine.

Susan decided to go underground to help build the revolutionary anti-imperialist clandestine movement. She was captured on November 29, 1984 with Timothy Blunk in New Jersey and convicted of possessing dynamite, weapons, and false identification. They were each sentenced to 58 years in prison.<sup>27</sup> (The average sentence for possession of dynamite is 16 months.)

Susan says of herself, "I grew up in Amerika...and I experienced the violence of this country...the violence and the poverty and the racism towards Black, Puerto Rican, Mexican, Indian, Asian people. A hatred of women, a contempt towards old people. Class exploitation where a few govern

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<sup>27</sup> Information in these three paragraphs from *Women Political Prisoners and Prisoners of War*, by the Committee to Fight Repression, New York, New York.

and rule at the expense of the lives and humanity of people all over the world."

In a March, 1986, interview with the *East Village Eye* Susan spoke about violence:

*I hate violence. But I don't know what other way there is to go when you live in a society that will never give up the power. Never. You have to take the power. I think we have a false sense of democracy in this country because for Black people, Indians, Latino people, democracy doesn't exist....Starvation, unemployment, when people are alienated from their own lives and from control of their destinies, that to me is violence.*

*I would want to add that in the movements of armed struggle, people spend an incredible amount of time figuring how to carry out activities against the enemy that minimize the loss of life. Because none of us want to kill innocent people. No one has been injured in any of the anti-apartheid and anti-U.S.-involvement-in-Central-America bombings in the past three years. We would rather have been captured than to hurt civilians. But this is 1985 and the U.S. military has a plane that they use in El Salvador that can shoot (an area) the size of a football field in less than a minute. So, pacifism? I don't think so.*

## Women who fought back against physical and sexual abuse

Claudia McCormick asked the 53 women in Chicago jail charged with killing their batterers why after repeated beatings they killed him this time. "In every instance, the woman answered that there

was a different look in his eyes, a different expression, and all said that at the time the murder occurred they felt it was 'either him or me.'"<sup>28</sup>

When Marvin Wolfgang analyzed Philadelphia homicides involving spouse killings he found that men kill women they have previously attacked while women kill men who have attacked them.<sup>29</sup>

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### Hazel Kontos

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Hazel was sentenced to life in Birmingham, Alabama for shooting her husband who beat her and once held her at gunpoint.

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### Janice Painter

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Janice was sentenced to life in Tacoma, Washington for killing her 28-year-old stepson, who had hospitalized her and raped her daughter.

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### Juanita Thomas

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On June 20, 1980, Juanita Thomas, a Black woman, was convicted of first degree murder and given a life sentence for stabbing the man who had battered her for six years.

During the trial, the prosecutor aroused the racism of the all-white jury by stereotyping Black people as violent and Black women as immoral.

<sup>28</sup> *NY Times*. "Women Who Kill Their Spouses," March 10, 1978, by Cynthia McCormick.

<sup>29</sup> *Patterns of Criminal Homicide*. Marvin E. Wolfgang.

Juanita was sent to the maximum security unit of the Huron Valley Women's Prison in Michigan. She can be written to there at: 3511 Bemis Rd., Ypsilanti, Michigan 48197. Her prisoner number is 16 1091.<sup>30</sup>

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### Rita Silk Nauri

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Rita Silk Nauri is a 44-year old Standing Rock Lakota Sioux. In 1979 she had been battered by the man she lived with for two years. She was involuntarily released into his custody from a psychiatric institution, where she had been given psychotropic drugs. After he took her home and battered her again, Rita ran away. Confused, she wandered the streets of Los Angeles for two days. Eventually she decided to take her son to his father's people in Oklahoma where he would be safe.

Her confusion and agitation was apparent to Security at the Oklahoma City airport, who later came after the two of them, as they were walking along the highway away from the airport. In the ensuing confrontation, one of the two cops manhandled the child into the police car. Trying to protect her child, Rita grabbed the other cop's gun and started shooting. One cop was killed, the other injured. When Rita was apprehended a half hour later she was severely beaten.

At her trial the judge disallowed a plea of self defense based on the "Wanrow instructions," established in the self-defense case of Evan Wanrow in Washington State. So, Rita pled "temporary

<sup>30</sup> Editor's note: we have reprinted, separately, a list of addresses for many of the prisoners written about in this publication. Juanita's address is not on that list, and so is included here.

insanity" to the charge of first degree murder. Rita feels she was made temporarily insane by the battering and psychiatric drugging.

The judge barred traditional Indian people from the courtroom during her trial because they brought in a sacred pipe and eagle fan, and he threatened to have anyone wearing a "Free Rita" button arrested. The all-white jury found her guilty of manslaughter and shooting with intent to kill. They recommended she get 150 years. The judge stated that if it were up to him, he'd give her more. Rita sees it as a "victory" that she did not receive the death penalty.

Rita has appealed her case based on denial of due process, a biased jury, and the withholding of evidence by the prosecution. She is now awaiting the Federal court's ruling.

Although Rita has become increasingly interested in Native American traditional religion, the Oklahoma prison system does not allow sweats, sacred objects or traditional spiritual leaders within the prison.

Rita writes from Oklahoma Prison, "We all recognize that every parent has the right, a God given duty, to protect and defend their children from aggressors of all kinds. I see this as a central issue to be supported as long as people walk the earth.

I also believe my unjust imprisonment serves to uncover racial prejudice that has been hidden under layers of polite veneer and well advertised tokenism dished out by PR men in well-tailored suits."<sup>31</sup>

<sup>31</sup> Information in this section taken from *Fight Back*, edited by Frederique Delacoste and Felice Newman, and from communication with Doug Parr, attorney for Rita Silk Nauri, July, 1987.

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## AND MANY MORE

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## Sanctuary Movement

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Sanctuary workers around the country provide support, protection, and advocacy for refugees from Central America. The only woman currently serving a sentence in the U.S. for sanctuary work is Stacey Merkt, a North American. In January, 1987, Stacey was sentenced to 179 days in the Federal Correctional Center in Ft. Worth, Texas for "conspiring to smuggle illegal aliens" from El Salvador to Texas. Prior to that, she had a 90 day suspended sentence and was on probation: after her sentencing, she also had to serve the additional 90 days.

Stacey, who has been adopted as prisoner of conscience by Amnesty International, is pregnant and in poor health. She feared losing her baby if she gave birth in prison. Because of her doctor's advice, and considerable community support, Stacey has been allowed to serve the last 83 days of her sentence under house arrest instead of at FCC.<sup>32</sup> She has been in seclusion with her family and may not leave her home without court permission.

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<sup>32</sup> Rio Grande Defense Committee, San Benito, Texas, April 1987.

**We would like to announce that on July 16, 1987, Assata Shakur of the Black Liberation Army, will celebrate her 40th birthday in freedom. She was liberated from prison in Trenton, New Jersey, in the fall of 1979. Happy Birthday Assata!**

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## More About Lesbians in Prison

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**Censorship of literature.** Prison authorities try to make us invisible to each other as well as to the world at large. For many years, lesbian and gay prisoners could not receive gay literature. In 1978 there was a federal case, litigated by the National Gay Task Force and various publications, including *Gay Community News*, to allow gay literature in prisons. There was an out-of-court settlement, and after that gay publications were allowed inside. (GCN reports that there are 75 women prisoners now receiving GCN.) However, the issue has been raised again: political prisoners in the Lexington Control Unit are not allowed to receive gay publications on the grounds that they encourage homosexual activities and that this is "potentially detrimental to the discipline, good order, and security of the institution".

In prison, the lesbiphobia rampant in society at large is intensified. Lesbians who are more "out" or more visibly butch run the greatest risk of being targets of harassment and violence, both from prison authorities and other inmates. Lesbians who react to provocation and harassment can find themselves drugged, losing their "good time," or even facing new charges and longer sentences.

Butches tend to do more time and harder time than other women. For instance, at Sibyl Brand Institute for Women in Southern California, butches were put in "Daddy Tanks" as a way of isolating them from the rest of the population. They were given night job assignments and ate in isolation so they could never see the other women prisoners.

Whenever two women are caught being sexual in prison, the

more obvious dyke is then subject to increased scrutiny for the rest of her time.

**Resistance and Organizing**  
Countless imprisoned lesbians have struggled to improve their conditions and the conditions of other women prisoners. Very few of these struggles have been recorded; this is even more true of poor and working-class lesbians and dykes of color. Lesbian resistance consists of anything from refusing to "feminize" one's appearance and behavior, to legal suits that have set precedents increasing prisoner's right throughout the country, to organizing both inside and out.

Collecting information on this subject is particularly difficult. It usually consists of tracking down someone who knows someone who once was locked up with someone who did something. These stories, incomplete as they are, are just the tip of the iceberg.

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### Aid to Incarcerated Mothers

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Susan Saxe is a Jewish lesbian feminist who was a political prisoner in the Correctional Institute, Framingham, Massachusetts for seven years. By surveying other prisoners at Framingham she found out the primary thing women there wanted help with was maintaining contact with their children. Mothers in jail risk having their children placed for adoption because they are not caring for them. Many incarcerated mothers are unaware of his legal situation and do not know how or haven't the resources to prevent it from happening.

With support from Urban Planning Aid, a community-based progressive organization, Susan began Aid to Incarcerated Mothers. She

wanted to replicate, for all the mothers at Framington, the friendship and support network men prisoners typically have (through their wives, mothers, and girlfriends) and that Susan had from her lesbian community.

Aid To Incarcerated Mothers (AIM) matched volunteers and incarcerated mothers one-to-one. The volunteer brought the children to visit their mother, and, when needed, advocated for her with the Department of Public Welfare, worked on her behalf finding a job, apartment, and drug and alcohol programs as she neared her release date, and generally provided emotional support for the mother and children.

AIM approached the child custody regulations state-wide by working with the newly formed Department of Social Services (DSS) and writing women in prison into the child welfare bureaucracy, based on the model used when mothers had to undergo long-term hospitalization. It is now DSS procedure to check with the Department of Corrections when they can't find a mother, so that a woman doesn't get charged with abandonment because she's been locked up. All incarcerated mothers in Massachusetts have the opportunity for a written family plan, including visitation. As well as breaking ground in the corrections field, AIM has set precedent in the area of adoption by facilitating open adoptions, when that is the desire of the mother.

Susan Saxe is now out of prison and active in the struggle for reproductive rights. She was recently denied permission to speak to women prisoners at the Philadelphia House of Corrections on pre-natal care.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> From personal communication with Susan Saxe, June, 1987.

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### Carol Crooks

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Carol Crooks is a Black dyke who was imprisoned at Bedford Hills, New York. Her resistance is legendary. Along with Black Muslim women, Carol filed a class action suit that resulted in no more strip searches by male guards. Carol is now out of prison.

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### Linda Evans

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While incarcerated in New Orleans, Linda Evans (see biography under personal stories) was instrumental in changing the prison rules so that the women locked up there could have visitors under 16. This enabled many mothers and children to see each other for the first time in a long while.

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### Nevada State Prison

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Lesbians at Nevada State Prison, who were accused of being in a lesbian gang dealing drugs and were put in long-term segregation, filed suit against prison authorities in 1983. So far, we have not learned the outcome of this suit.

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### Rita D. Brown

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Rita D. Brown is a working-class, butch dyke, born and raised in an alcoholic family. Rita first went to prison in 1971 when the judge gave her time instead of the recommended probation. This sentence was based on the usual lesbiphobia; obvious dykes get more time.

In 1978 she was convicted for a bank robbery committed when she was a member of the George Jackson Brigade (GJB). The GJB was

an underground group of urban guerrillas who claimed responsibility for several bombings and bank robberies in the Pacific Northwest. Rita was the property of the Federal Bureau of Prisons from 1978 to 1986. She was originally housed in the Maximum Security unit (control type unit), often transferred, and spent almost four years under some degree of preventative detention type lockdown.

Rita often acted as a jailhouse lawyer. While doing time in Nevada, she was the legal advocate who represented prisoners in disciplinary hearings. Once, when a woman was charged with "sexually stimulating activity" (a two-second kiss on the cheek), a dismissal was won by asking the accusing guard just how she was sexually stimulated by the sight of that kiss.

Another time Rita assisted another lesbian prisoner who was being harassed by a male guard. They wrote him up for visual rape. This grievance resulted in a new prison memorandum that stated male guards were required to knock before entering a woman's cell.

Rita also assisted others in filing a variety of writs, appeals, and civil suits in state and federal courts.

When Assata Shakur was liberated from prison in November, 1979, Rita was locked down without benefit of any kind of due process. The prison's excuse for this was that the two women were friends in the Maximum Security unit. A writ concerning this illegal situation filed by a lesbian attorney resulted in a precedent-setting victory. This case has been successfully used on several occasions by other prisoners to combat arbitrary reassignment to segregation units.

Rita was paroled in January 1986, and now lives and works in

San Francisco. She will be on parole until 1998. Rita is active in the women's community and continues to do prison support work.

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### ROSI

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Sherron McMorris is a 43 year old working-class lesbian, mixed-blood Blackfoot, artist and survivor, who was incarcerated for a total of 17 years, beginning when she was eight years old.

In 1960, while she was at California Rehabilitation Center Sherron and five other women—two of them lesbians—began the Sisterhood, a program that brought entertainment into the prison. The Sisterhood also put on talent shows and put out a newspaper inside the prison. Because the women in the Sisterhood were tired of the dehumanizing prison bureaucratic way of dealing with people, they organized their filing system according to astrological signs.

After she got out of prison, Sherron saw a book of prison poetry from California Institute for Women and was moved to write to one of the authors in the book, Pebbles Tribbit. Out of this correspondence came Remember Our Sisters Inside (ROSI), a program that produced buttons, notecards and posters from women prisoners' artwork. ROSI had her first art show opening in June, 1984. According to Sherron, "It was the Goddess' hand" that got ROSI going.

Men prisoners and their supporters have modelled a program after ROSI called Remember Our Brothers Inside.

Sherron lives in the Bay Area where she continues to work hard on her survival.

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## Veronica Compton

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Veronica Compton is a lesbian prisoner at Purdey Institute for Women in Washington State. She has tried to apply the state gay rights ordinance inside the prison by filing grievances. She and her lover have been written up for "homosexual behavior." She is an artist in her 30s who has been locked up for eight years. Her sentence is for "natural life."

Other lesbians at Purdey working with Women Out Now, a feminist group doing prisoner support work, formed a Gay Activists Alliance inside the prison in the late 70's. Two lesbian prisoners were granted furloughs to establish contacts in the lesbian community to assist them in transitioning in life outside.

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## Hundreds of Lesbians

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Hundreds, perhaps thousands, of lesbians have been jailed for relatively short periods of time in anti-nuclear, civil-rights for racial minorities, anti-rape, environmental protection, anti-war, animal-rights, anti-pornography, gay rights, anti-apartheid, disability rights, anti-imperialist, immigration and border issues, anti-Klan, women's rights and other actions. Many of these dykes have expressed their lesbian resistance to patriarchal authority while locked up by non-cooperation, refusing to give their names, eat prison food, be vaginally or rectally searched, etc. Again, butch lesbians have done harder time under these conditions. Many of these lesbians have also acted in solidarity with other prisoners using the media attention their cases received, support from their own communities, and their

speedy releases to get lawyers, supplies, money, and other support to sister prisoners in for longer time.

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## The Lexington Control Unit

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On October 30, 1986, the control unit for women prisoners was opened in a specially-constructed basement area at the federal prison in Lexington, Kentucky. Puerto Rican Prisoner of War Alejandrina Torres and Northamerican anti-imperialist political prisoner Susan Rosenberg were both transferred to the prison on October 30.

Alejandrina and Susan have been told that the Lexington Control Unit was designed for women prisoners where there is a threat that "external forces" might aid in an escape. They were told that they were placed in the unit because of their "political associations."

The goal of control units is exactly that—control. They are designed not only to isolate political prisoners from the prison population, the community and the movements they are part of, but to destroy their political identities.

In a 1982 meeting in Washington D.C. between social scientists and prison wardens, Dr. Edward Schein presented an address called "Man Against Man: Brainwashing." He advised placing individuals into "new and ambiguous situations for which the standards are kept deliberately unclear, and then pressuring to conform to what is desired in order to win favor and a reprieve from the pressure." This is exactly what is being implemented at Lexington, where rules change from hour to hour. Nazi documents captured after World War II show that this is the way they administered the concentration/extermination

camp. Schein recommended "physical removal of prisoners from those they respect (to break or seriously weaken close emotional ties)" and "using techniques of character invalidation, i.e. humiliation, revilements, and shoutings to induce feelings of guilt, fear, and suggestibility, coupled with sleeplessness and exacting prison regimen and periodic interrogational interviews."

Every aspect of the conditions at Lexington is designed so that the prisoners have no power over their lives. Their movements, what they read (they are only allowed books from the Unit's library), what they wear (all personal clothing has been replaced by institutional clothing), and who they talk to are all regulated. Susan and Alejandrina were told that they can be transferred out of the unit if the conditions that resulted in their designation no longer exist...In other words, if they renounce their politics.

The U.S. government, while denying that there are any political prisoners in its jails, knows very well that these women are a threat to a repressive system, not only in society at large, but within the prison population! They stand up for their own civil and human rights and for those of other prisoners. They fight to direct people's anger and frustration into focused resistance. The prison administrators do not want political prisoners in the general population—therefore, isolation is a major goal.

## TORTURE

Though Warden Robert Matthews claims the women receive programs equivalent to those available to the general population, the sensory deprivation and social isolation within the Lexington Control Unit amounts to psychological torture. By never allowing them into

the general prisoner population, the women's social world has shrunk to four, plus the guards. Note that Amnesty International suggests a minimum of 16-20 people for the maintenance of mental health, and in 1976 condemned the smaller groupings of prisoners in West Germany's maximum security units, calling them psychological torture.

Social isolation and sensory deprivation are on Amnesty's list of psychological tortures because of their shocking effectiveness at destroying the human personality. "In order to maintain normal mental functioning, human beings are dependent on a regular diet of varied sensory stimuli."<sup>34</sup> Without it, they suffer gross disturbances of perception, cognition and learning, inability to communicate or concentrate, psychosomatic illnesses, and depression. Dr. W. Sliega writes, "Under isolation, the personality deteriorates so intensely that a sentence to maximum security prison equals double, triple, or quadruple time in regular jails."

Edward Peters notes the changes in torturers' goals that prompted the development of the technology of psychological torture: "It is not the victim's information, but the victim's needs to be won—or reduced to powerlessness."

The European Commission on Human Rights has also concluded that since sensory and social isolation cannot be justified by security needs, their use betrays an ulterior motive.

Isolation-detention has become a new 20th century form of "clean" torture. In West Germany as well as in the U.S. some prisoners are subjected to a combination

of sensory deprivation and brainwashing techniques that effectively destroy the prisoner's personality, in many cases leading them to "suicide." The isolation method was developed and first applied during the Kennedy administration as part of the prison reform programs.

Since 1972, suspected "terrorists" in Germany have been detained for as many as five years while waiting for trial. During this time, a series of scientifically developed techniques is systematically applied to them. Soundless, windowless steel cells are used, neon lights, video cameras and listening devices are on constantly—there is no privacy. Prisoners are kept without direct social contact for years—only family are allowed visits—in frequently. Then the brainwashing techniques begin. And what are the results? According to the Law School in Belbao, Spain:

- Petra Krause began to vomit regularly and lose her hair, her muscles atrophying, after 540 days in solitary confinement for Red Army Faction (RAF) members in a Swiss prison.
- In a West German Control Unit, RAF prisoner Werner Hoppe vomitted all he ate and had frequent intestinal hemorrhages. He was finally freed, for health reasons, with serious psycho-physical flaws that would prevent his living a normal life.
- Following seven years in isolation, RAF member Ingrid Schubert "killed herself" in an isolation wing of St. Ammheim Prison, Munich, Germany. (St. Ammheim was the model for Lexington.) Her last letters revealed the inability to distinguish reality from illusion, sleep from waking.

The wholesale compromising of civil rights that prevails in West Germany has yet to be seen in the U.S. But the Justice Department, under Reagan, has forged several ways around constitutional rights. These methods were instrumental in the capture, conviction, and sentencing of the women at Lexington.

Besides stepping up the use of the grand jury to jail political activists without trial, the government has upped the ante by making non-collaboration with the government a criminal offense, allowing no mitigation factors. This was used successfully in Silvia Baraldini's case.

The Racketeering Influenced Corrupt Organizations Act (RICO) allows conviction merely for membership of any group that has at least two members who are convicted of any broad category of crimes over a ten-year period. RICO was used against Baraldini who got 40 years, the maximum sentence.

## THE WOMEN IN LEXINGTON

There are four women (so far as we know) being held at the Lexington Control Unit.

- Alejandrina Torres (see earlier biography).
- Silvia Baraldini (see earlier biography).
- Susan Rosenberg (see earlier biography).
- Debra Brown, a Black woman sentenced for kidnapping and murder in a well-known local case in Lexington. We know little about her.

These women are kept in the Lexington Control Unit, where the rules are constantly changing. Since there are no written guidelines, there is nothing from which to appeal. Rosenberg's attorney,

<sup>34</sup> *The Brain Benders. A Study of the Effects of Isolation,* Charles Brownfield, New York, 1972.

Mary O'Melveny, says this is one of the prime methods of control.

At first painted completely white, the basement recalled the "white torture" units where RAF prisoners have been kept in Germany (lack of color has been shown to be harmful psychologically). As a concession to a national demonstration outside the prison on March 7 for International Women's Day (demonstrators flew kites with the women's faces on the kites) the control unit was repainted peach. This is an extreme relief, the women say.

- Living in the white glare, Alejandrina's eyesight has been blurring to the point she could no longer read. "Headaches were my constant companion," she says. It took officials four months to take her to an optometrist, even though the prison medical facility is housed directly above the basement unit.
- A month after the painting, noxious fumes still filled the closed basement air. Alejandrina recently had heart palpitations and was refused a trip to the infirmary.
- Nothing may be posted on the walls for reasons of "sanitation."
- Frosted glass windows covered by metal shields with holes in them are located at ceiling level in the 9' x 10' x 10' cells. Two cells in the 16-cell unit have eye-level windows, but the women are not allowed in those cells.
- Video cameras observe the women at all times, and guards comment over the intercom about what they see, even in the shower ante room where the women must wait for the water to heat.

- Generally, it is too hot or cold in the temperature-controlled environment.
- Allowed outside for one hour daily, the women enter a special courtyard with high wooden fences behind the barbed wire ones that block any view of the landscape. Usually they receive recreation when shadows deprive them of direct sunlight.
- They are required to wear culottes, to make them more "feminine." This is also to clearly identify them as inmates in the control unit, since no other prisoner in the facility is required to wear a uniform.

The women say the guards try to exploit any vulnerability—for example, when one of them needed a sanitary napkin, the female guard in charge sent a male guard dangling a single napkin by its strap, calling the woman's name.

Sexual assault is on Amnesty's list of psychological torture. According to her attorneys while being held for trial in Chicago, Alejandrina was assaulted twice by the same Lt. Lewis. In the second attack, Alejandrina was handcuffed—Lewis held her head between his legs while four female guards beat and strip searched her. Then Lewis dragged her down the hall by her right arm, injuring it so she lost its full use for a year.

Susan and Alejandrina's send-off from Fuscon to LCU was a forced vaginal and rectal cavity search by a male physician's assistant. The women protested that the search was needless and asked to be X-rayed instead. Alejandrina said, "Whatever you're trying to get will be obvious from an X-ray." And then they whole medical crew started laughing. "We won't get what we want from an X-ray," they replied. She says, "And then I knew what they were talking

about. They wanted humiliation." Officially the prison has ruled that the forced digital probe was within regulations and medically sound practice.

## CONTACT WITH THE REST OF THE WORLD

- The women are allowed one 15-minute phone call per week. Even this is often cut off or denied.
- The prisoners, who receive unsolicited mail from around the world, refused to submit lists of correspondents who would then be subject to investigation. After 5,000 letters of protest arrived at the prison, they were allowed to receive their mail.
- Leftist and gay/lesbian literature is not allowed, particularly any containing information regarding public reaction to the Lexington Control Unit.
- Although the women maintained extensive visitor lists without incident before being transferred to the control unit, the only visitors they are now allowed are immediate family and attorneys. The maximum visitation time is two hours per day, weekdays only. Alejandrina's husband and children live eight hours away. Susan's parents live in New York and Silvia's mother and sister are in Europe. Silvia was transferred to LSU shortly after her family had made a trip to visit, making it unlikely they will be able to come again soon.

Silvia Baraldini writes from LSU:



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*I have struggled long and hard on how best to portray our life here. Control—total control—is part of our daily reality. Every time we eat, bathe, call, write, submit a memo, etc., it is dutifully recorded. As Alex says, every time we sneeze it is written in some book somewhere to be used for future reference. Control extends to severely limiting access to our friends and comrades on the outside. In this context the issue of censorship becomes particularly troubling. The contact with the movement is our lifeline.*

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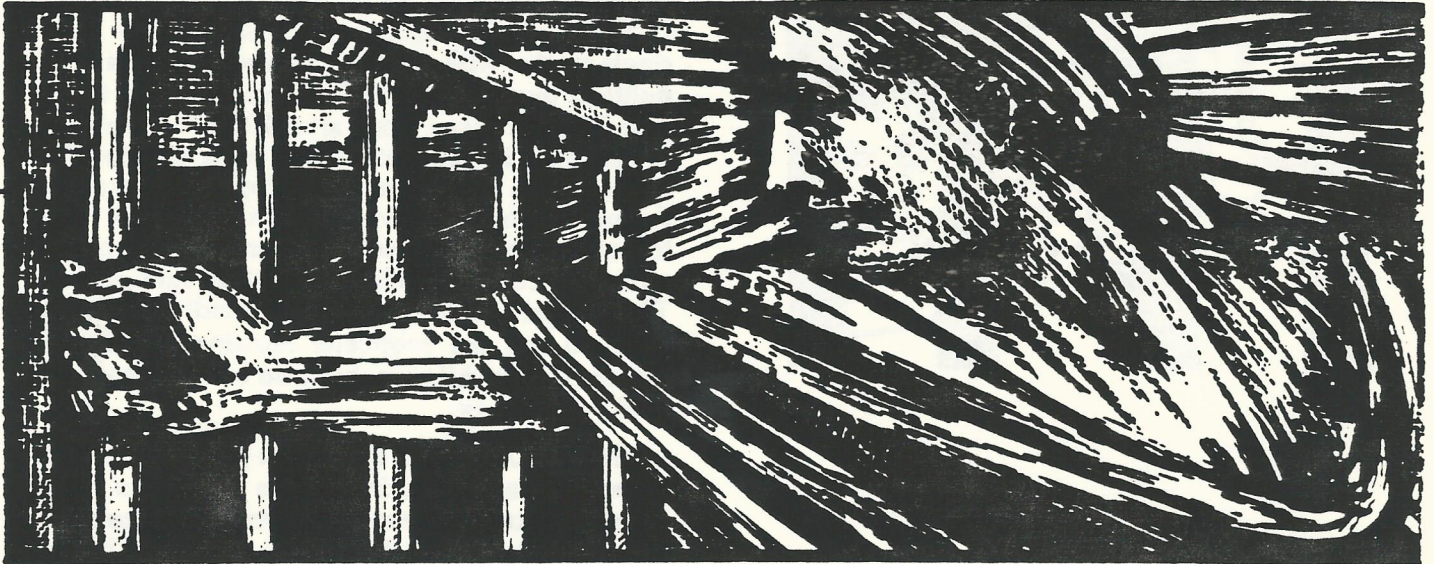
## What About Grand Juries?

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Grand juries are not just from the past: there is currently a political grand jury being held in Los Angeles. It is aimed at the Black political community there and will be in session through December, 1987. We know of at least one person, a Black man, Watani Tyehimba, who has been incarcerated for refusing to testify.

In the following articles, outdated information has been crossed out.

# FBI/Grand Jury Repression . . . and Resistance: A PRIMER



*Southern Coalition Report on Jails & Prisons*

*"A new breed of political animal . . . spawned in a dark corner of the Department of Justice, nourished by an Administration bent on twisting law enforcement to serve its own political ends."*

That's how Sen. Edward Kennedy described grand juries in 1973. Since that time the list of groups and individuals attacked by this "new breed of political animal" has grown to include advocates of independence for Puerto Rico, Black community activists and critics of the FBI's COINTELPRO program to destroy Third World leadership and community organizations, women's rights and gay community activists and others. Many proposals to reform grand jury laws have been defeated by strong opposition from the Department of Justice.

The grand jury was originally designed to guard against the tendency of governments to use the criminal justice system to punish its critics. It has

become one of the most powerful instruments of political repression. Working with the FBI and other police and intelligence agencies, a federal prosecutor can subpoena any one at any time to appear anywhere in the United States. The subpoena can command the witness to come and answer questions, or to bring tax, bank, personal, business or organizational records. It can order a witness to participate in a lineup, submit to fingerprinting, or turn over samples of handwriting or hair. There is virtually no legal defense to such an order.

Historically, grand juries have been given a very free hand to investigate because they were supposed to be independent of the government, and represent the community. Their job is supposed to be to decide whether the prosecutor has enough evidence to charge someone with a particular crime. Today, grand juries usually do not represent poor people, working people or Third World people; they rarely include single women responsible for young children or people who do not live in major cities.

The men and women who serve on the grand jury are not told of their duty to prevent abuses of power by the prosecutor and "stand between the accuser and accused." Instead they are turned into passive spectators in witch hunts or other programs devised by prosecutors, police and FBI agents. Often the grand jury is not even considering whether to charge someone with a particular crime. It is "fishing" for evidence—or a crime—or merely gathering information about particularly troublesome opponents of the government.



## **RICO: RUSHING TOWARDS 1984**

On October 20, 1981 a number of members or former members of the Weather Underground and Black Liberation Army were arrested and charged with the attempted robbery of an armored truck carrying bank deposits. Very soon after those arrests, the U.S. Attorney in Manhattan announced that he was going to conduct a special 36-month grand jury investigation. The subject of his investigation was not the bank robbery—a Rockland County, New York grand jury was doing that and eventually charged seven people for the Brinks incident. The Manhattan prosecutor wanted to investigate his theory that many different political groups opposed to U.S. policy at home and abroad had joined forces to accomplish a different crime: "to put an end to U.S. government as we know, it," was how he described it.

The New York grand jury that was convened in November 1981 was called to investigate what can only be called "thought-crime." Its official reason for being is a law enacted in 1970 designed to keep

"organized crime" from taking over labor unions. But the language of the "Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations" (commonly referred to as "RICO" statute) is so broad that virtually anyone can be prosecuted for virtually any kind of activity, association or opinion. The Manhattan U.S. Attorney in charge of the "Brinks" investigation said that what all the groups he proposed to investigate had in common was "a belief in socialism."

As of April 1982, three women are in jail for refusing to cooperate with this grand jury—Yaasmyn Fula, Jerri Gaines, and Eve Rosahn. They do not all know each other or belong to any common organization. Yaasmyn Fula, a Black single mother with one son, is a legal worker who has worked for six years to help victims of the FBI's illegal COINTELPRO program. Jerri Gaines is a Black single mother with eight children who belongs to no political organization and was subpoenaed to the grand jury in New York after 200 SWAT-trained armed men in helicopters and tanks invaded her farmhouse in Byrdtown, Mississippi to falsely arrest Fulani Sunni-Ali. Eve Rosahn, a white anti-imperialist activist, was initially arrested and charged as an accomplice in Nyack and then subpoenaed. The charges against her proved groundless and were dropped but the subpoena remained. A fourth woman, Ivette Alfonso, has also been subpoenaed to the grand jury.

The RICO law has also given prosecutors wide powers to harass and investigate the Puerto Rican independence movement. Hundreds of *independen-tistas* have been questioned and threatened by the FBI, both in Puerto Rico and in New York, Chicago and elsewhere on the mainland. Maria Cueto, who directed the National Commission on Hispanic Affairs for the Episcopal Church, was subpoenaed to a grand jury in Manhattan in 1977. The subpoena ordered her to turn over all the records of that Church Commission. She refused to do so, on grounds that she would lose the trust of the Latin people the Church was supposed to be ministering to. She went to jail for eight months in 1977-1978, and was released when a federal judge said that he was convinced her stand was a principled one which would not be changed by the threat of jail. Late in 1981 Maria Cueto was again subpoenaed to a grand jury, this time in Brooklyn. Both grand juries were said to be investigating "terrorism" in the Puerto Rican independence movement.

Unfortunately these horror stories are not new or unique. Since 1970 hundreds of political activists and other principled people have been jailed for refusing to cooperate with federal grand juries aimed at destroying political opposition to government policies. Thousands of people have been stopped, harassed and questioned by agents of the FBI and other government investigators.

Anyone can be called as a witness before a grand jury. Lawyers, priests and news reporters have gone to jail for refusing to cooperate with this process. So have ambulance drivers and community health workers, secretaries, teachers and single mothers. Representatives of just about every significant political movement in the U.S. and abroad have been faced with the choice: cooperate, or risk going to jail.

The government is counting on the seriousness of that threat. Prosecutors and FBI agents, and most judges, believe that most people would sacrifice their principles rather than go to jail. That is one of the sources of the grand jury's power. Understanding how grand juries work and how their powers can be abused is the secret of building effective resistance to this form of political repression.

This pamphlet is designed to help people understand what federal grand juries can do, how they work and how they can be resisted. It is written for family, friends and members of community or support groups of people subpoenaed to politically motivated federal grand juries. It provides a basic introduction to procedure and law to people who may be subpoenaed to a grand jury.

If you have been contacted by the FBI, the information in this pamphlet may help you stop the harassment. But if you have already been contacted, or if you received a subpoena, you should consult with a lawyer right away. This information is no substitute for personal consultation with a lawyer who has experience with political grand juries. And it is no substitute for consultation with your own political or other support group.

~~IF YOU HAVE BEEN CONTACTED BY THE FBI OR SERVED WITH A GRAND JURY SUBPOENA, YOU SHOULD GET HELP. For more information, call:~~

~~THE GRAND JURY PROJECT  
853 Broadway, NYC 10003  
(212) 674-6005~~

~~OR~~

~~THE NATIONAL LAWYERS GUILD  
853 Broadway, NYC 10003  
(212) 260-1360~~

~~OR~~

~~The local chapter of the  
National Lawyers Guild in  
your area~~

~~OR~~

~~THE NATIONAL CONFERENCE  
OF BLACK LAWYERS  
126 West 119th Street  
New York 10026~~

## WHAT TO DO:

### WHEN THE FBI COMES KNOCKING:

1. You don't have to let them in. Unless you are shown a search warrant, you are under no obligation to let police, FBI or other investigators in to your home, office or any where else. You do not have to turn over records or books, files, photos, handwriting or type samples. **SO DON'T LET THEM IN.**

2. You don't have to answer their questions. Although they may tell you that you will be subpoenaed if you don't answer their questions, (a) this is not always true, and (b) you will certainly be subpoenaed if you *do* answer their questions. **SO DON'T ANSWER THEIR QUESTIONS.**

3. It is a crime to lie to them. Sometimes "I don't remember" and "I don't know" are clearly lies. The risk of getting charged with making a false statement is one excellent reason not to say anything to the FBI. **SO DON'T LIE TO THE FBI. It is a crime!**



4. There is really one safe response to a visit from the FBI. Take their names and telephone numbers and tell them that you do not want to speak to them without consulting a lawyer. Write down as much as you can about their visit, **AND CALL A LAWYER.**

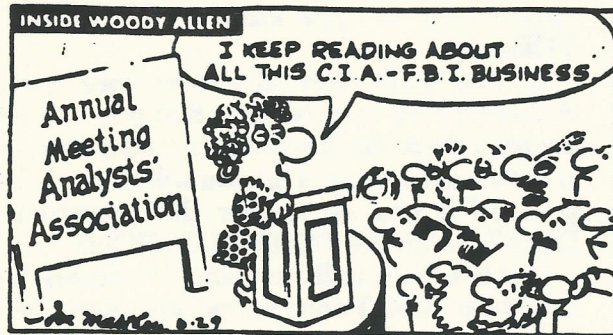
### REMEMBER:

1. FBI agents are trained to get information. You cannot outsmart them at their game. You don't know what information they are trying to get. They (probably) do.

2. Not all government investigators identify themselves as such. Don't answer questions or give interviews to complete strangers until you've talked to someone who knows them. Never answer questions about anything politically sensitive over the telephone. This includes information about who is involved in what organizations.

3. You can't cooperate "just enough to satisfy them." Once they see that you can be forced to yield information, they will press for more. . . . and more.

subpoena, you must begin to organize immediately. Coordination of the legal and political strategy is most important.



4. Don't let them scare you. FBI agents do not get prosecuted for lying about how much information they have about someone, or what they can do to or for you. They lie. Don't panic, and don't get paranoid. If you are visited, tell: your close associates, your political organizations, your lawyer, the Grand Jury Project. . .

#### IF YOU ARE SUBPOENAED:

1. Go immediately to a lawyer familiar with grand jury abuse. If you don't know one, call the Grand Jury Project. Most lawyers in general practice have no experience dealing with grand juries, and will need help in this legal battle.

2. Think about publicizing the investigation, the FBI tactics and the grand jury subpoena. Consult with political associates and friend and decide how to let other people in the community know, and to organize resistance to the grand jury and support for your case.

## FIGHTING A GRAND JURY SUBPOENA

There are two basic things to do once you have been given a grand jury subpoena:

1. See a lawyer and decide how you are going to respond; and
2. Talk with your political organizations, friends, family and other sources of support, and **START TO ORGANIZE.**

Political organizing is critical to grand jury resistance. The legal options are very few and very narrow; victories are rare—but worth fighting for. The most important questions for a grand jury witness—whether she or he will go to jail and for how long—often depend more on successful organizing than on legal motions. Once you have decided that you are going to fight the grand jury 4

# SISTERS ON THE INSIDE

The judicial/prison system most often comes up in feminist discussion in deciding how to deal with men who commit crimes against women. The urgency of ending violence against us has compelled women to implicitly support this system.

However, in doing this, we cut ourselves off from the struggles of women who are imprisoned. We also lose sight of our long-term goal of a society not based in coercion; a goal that requires the dismantling of the prison system. We need to remember how women's issues and prison issues are part of the same struggle.

Prison issues are important for feminists both because individual women are being oppressed by prison and, in a wider context, because the judicial/prison system exists to support the larger power structure that oppresses us all.

Women in prison are fighting to maintain a sense of self within a system that isolates and degrades; one which attempts to teach submission to authority through the constant exercising of power, in both serious and petty ways, over prisoners. What is generated is not obedience but anger. And since a prisoner risks punishment such as being sent to segregation if she directs her anger at the system that's hurting her, that anger often gets directed inward or at other prisoners.

Because the most brutal methods of social control are directed at a society's most oppressed groups, the women most likely to be sent to jail are poor and/or women of colour. In North America, a very high proportion are Native. That the great majority of prisoners are in for crimes against property shows the system's role in maintaining the economic order.

Prison is a type of violence which enforces a state's power over its citizens, in the same way that rape and battering



## PRISONS AND SOCIAL CONTROL

enforce the power of men over women.

Since this kind of power by coercion is antithetical to feminism, we need to make prison abolition part of our feminist analysis.

One implication of this is that we have to reevaluate the strategy of trying to have abusive men put in prison. For now, it's one of the only strategies available to protect women and children from particularly violent men. What other approach could be used remains a difficult question. However, this doesn't have to stop us from opposing the prison system as a whole; we can recognize that if we use the system to convict violent men, it is an unsatisfactory and short term solution.

What we have to abandon is trying to inject feminist values into an essentially patriarchal system. We've seen how our demands, even when clearly articulated, are twisted and used in the state's interests in our recent anti-pornography work.

We've implicitly supported the system

by trying to change it using its own terms. Since the severity of the penalty for an action is supposed to express society's amount of disapproval for that action, feminists have pushed for stronger penalties for crimes against women as a way of increasing the expressed disapproval for these crimes. This doesn't work, for several reasons.

First, the justice system is controlled through government by the economic elite. It therefore supports that elite's interests (retaining power) and will continue to reflect their values and not those of feminists.

An example of these values is a recent sentencing by Supreme Court Judge Samuel Toy. Finding a B.C. man guilty of the rape and murder of a teenage woman, he sentenced him to fifteen years to be served concurrently with the sentence he had already received for the rape and murder of a second teenager. This same judge three years ago imposed a life sentence on political activist Ann Hansen

for her part in actions with the Wimmim's Fire Brigade and Direct Action.

This raises another point. When we support the state's imprisonment of a rapist, we support the state's right to imprison, period. And this is used against us when we challenge the system.

In the last decade or so, women in prison have also faced the backlash against feminism. Previously, the court held women less responsible for our actions than men, and thus women received shorter sentences. But this is one of the few places where disparity between women and men decreased quickly. One of the state's first responses to our demands for equal legal rights has been to hand out longer sentences to women.

Another problem is the whole approach of responding to someone's violent or irresponsible behaviour with various degrees of punishment. It implies that revenge is the most important response to a wrong-doing, rather than supporting the victim or trying to prevent the behaviour from happening again. It also suggests that people have to be coerced to behave responsibly.

Feminists must participate in the search for alternate ways of dealing with those who oppress. With the awareness that the judicial/prison system is not our ally in the long run, we'll be more reluctant to ask one part of the patriarchy to protect us from other parts.

Our other task is to learn about and support the struggles of prisoners. Women inside fight back and resist all the time. And although there are few methods of resistance open to prisoners, some of them are: talking back to guards, breaking rules, destroying prison property, participating in sit-ins, occupations, work or hunger strikes, and exposing brutality through the media and through lawsuits.

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Support from the outside is a crucial factor in the success of prisoners' campaigns. The knowledge that people outside care about what's happening contributes to prisoners' strength and makes prison administrators respond much more quickly to demands.

We can express our support for particular campaigns against unfair court decisions or treatment of prisoners through letter writing, protest phone calls, demonstrations and education campaigns in our communities. We can also work for reforms of the prison system, keeping in mind that this is an interim measure to abolishing prisons. This includes lobbying governments to fund more prison programs, with as many options available to female as male prisoners and training in a variety of jobs.

On an ongoing basis, we need to strengthen connections with our sisters inside. We must recognize women prisoners' struggles as an essential part of our movement. We can do this by:

- visiting women in prison, when possible; meeting with individual women who want visits, organizing informational or skill-sharing workshops, musicians can play gigs at prisons and so on.
- writing to women prisoners who request letters of support or correspondence.
- sharing our resources; sending money to defense funds and prisoner support or action groups, donating books, musical instruments, art supplies to prisoners.
- sharing information; sending periodicals free to prisoners, soliciting articles from prisoners, and providing material support to prisoner publications.