

# Notes from an Afrikan P.O.W. Journal book one



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#### On Transforming the Colonial/Criminal Mentality

Revolutions are fought to get control of land, to remove the absentee landlord and gain control of the land and the institutions that flow from that land. The black man has been in a very low condition because he has had no control whatsoever over any land. He has been a beggar economically, a beggar politically, a beggar socially, a beggar even when it comes to trying to get some education. The past type of mentality that was developed in this colonial system among our people, today is being overcome. And as the young ones come up, they know what they want (land!). And as they listen to your beautiful preaching about democracy and all those other flowery words, they know what they’re supposed to have (land!).

So you have a people today who not only know what they want, but also know what they are supposed to have. *And they themselves are creating another generation* that is coming up that not only will know what it wants and know what it should have but also will be ready and willing to do whatever is necessary to see that what they should have materializes immediately.

— El Hajj Malik El Shabazz (Malcolm X), “The Black Revolution,” *Malcolm X Speaks*

During a recent conversation with a comrade, the movie *Battle of Algiers* was mentioned. Its mentioning, within the context of that conversation, gave birth to the idea of using that film as a way of making a comment on the present and probable direction that many prisoners are taking and many more will take, in the escalating class and national liberation struggles in amerikkka.

An apology is made in advance, should we make errors in our recollection of events taking place in the film, or the order of their appearance.

In the opening scene, or, in one of the early scenes, the setting is a prison, and the principal character was, we believe, portrayed as Ali Aponte.

Ali Aponte, an Algerian who had entered the prison as a “common criminal,” or a “bandit,” was in the process of being politicized and of politicizing himself. He was being approached by a revolutionary, a Prisoner of War, who had noticed his strong sense of nationalism and his revolutionary potential; thus, his potential of becoming a revolutionary nationalist, rather than his remaining a bandit, a criminal, or a “lumpen” with nationalist sentiments, an emotional commitment to nationalism.

i know this already sounds familiar to many. “I’ve been in rebellion all my life. Just didn’t know it.” — Comrade-Brother George Jackson.

For a young black growing up in the ghetto, the first rebellion is always crime.

For George and Ali Aponte and for many others, in Algiers and in amerikkka. Many of George’s words are familiar to us.

Prisons are not institutionalized on such a massive scale by the people. Most people realize that crime is simply the result of a grossly disproportionate distribution of wealth and privilege, a reflection of the present state of property relations...

and

We must educate the people in the real causes of economic crimes. They must be made to realize that even crimes of passion are the psycho-social effects of an economic order that was decadent a hundred years ago. All crime can be traced to objective socio-economic conditions — socially productive or counterproductive activity. In all cases, it is determined by the economic system, the method of economic organization...

Many prisoners (in both minimum and maximum) and even many political prisoners have, We believe, not taken the interpretation of the above words far enough. We feel this way because many comrades have based many of their beliefs and positions on the “inherent” revolutionary capacity of “lumpen” on their understanding of the above-quoted statements. We tend to overlook the fact that George was making a broad analysis; he was describing objective factors and presenting a general ideological perspective. The grossly disproportionate distribution of wealth and privilege, and the “crime” that results from it, does not automatically make us revolutionaries.

The real causes of crime are not necessarily, or, are not alone, the causes of commitments to revolutionary struggle. Objective economic conditions, the method of economic organization, are not necessarily, not of themselves, factors which inspire and/or cement conscious activity in revolutionary nationalist people’s war.

George described the objective — the economic basis of “crime” — and he recognized that he had been objectively in “rebellion” all his life. But he also said: “Just didn’t know it.” He wasn’t *aware* of his acts as being forms of rebellion. He wasn’t *conscious* of himself as a victim of social injustice. And he wasn’t *consciously* directing his actions toward the destruction of the enemy.

I met Marx, Lenin, Trotsky, Engels and Mao...*and they redeemed me.* For the first four years, I studied nothing but economics and military ideas. I met the black guerrillas, George “Big Jake” Lewis, and James Carr, W.C. Nolen, Bill Christmas, Tony Gibson and many others. *We attempted to transform the black criminal mentality into a black revolutionary mentality.*

And comrades have asked, in 1977, “What is the difference between the ‘black criminal mentality’ and the ‘black revolutionary mentality’?” because they have seen no difference between them. And they saw no difference primarily because they read revolutionary actuality into the potentiality alluded to be George in his analysis of the

economic basis of “crime.” This is also related to the “learning by rote” of Marxism-Leninism, and to the overemphasis of the “economics of Marxism” and failure to grasp the significance of the “conscious element.”

The materialist doctrine that men are the products of circumstances and education, that changed men are therefore the products of other circumstances and of a different education, forgets that circumstances are in fact changed by men and that the educator must himself be educated.

— Marx: *Theses on Feuerbach*

Marxist philosophy holds that the most important problem does not lie in understanding the laws of the objective world and thus being able to explain it, but in applying the knowledge of these laws actively to change the world...Only social practice can be the criterion of truth.

— Mao Tse-tung

In order for us to know Ali Aponte today as an Algerian *revolutionary*, he had to become politicized, consciously join with the Algerian F.L.N., and point his guns at the enemies of the Algerian people.

The employment of the skills he acquired and sharpened as a “bandit” continued to “violate the law” of the colonial state; but the difference was fundamental.

Aponte’s previous violations of the colonialist state’s law were violations of an individual, for personal gain. But more important, they were seen even by him at that stage as true “violations of law” because the “law” and the state that it upheld were still recognized by Aponte as being legitimate. He *was* a “criminal” because he still saw himself as a “criminal,” which is part of the “criminal,” and the colonial, mentality.

For every system of state and law, and the capitalist system above all, exists in the last analysis because its survival, and the validity of its statutes, are simply accepted... The *isolated* violation of those statutes does not represent any particular danger to the state as long as such infringements figure in the general consciousness merely as isolated cases. Dostoyevsky has noted in his Siberian reminiscences how every criminal feels himself to be guilty (without necessarily feeling any remorse). He understands with perfect clarity that he has broken laws that are no less valid for him than for anyone else. And these laws retain their validity even when personal motives or the force of circumstances have induced him to violate them..

— George Lukacs: “Legality and Illegality,” *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics*.

This is the “criminal mentality” alluded to by George. And it was also similarly described by Comrade-Sister Assata Shakur:

i am sad when i see what happens to women who lose their strength. They see themselves as bad children who expect to be punished because they have not, in some way, conformed to the conduct required of “good children” in the opinion of prison guards. Therefore, when they are “punished” they feel absolution has been dealt and they are again in the “good graces” of the guards. Approval has been given by the enemy, but the enemy is no longer recognized as the enemy. The enemy becomes the maternal figure patterning their lives. It’s like a plantation in prison. You can see the need for a revolution. Clearly.

— from an interview printed in *Majority Report*, Jan. 24-Feb.7, 1976

Before George “met” Marx and the black guerrillas, *his* mentality was best characterized as “criminal.” It was only after he was “redeemed” that he was able to *see* himself as a victim of social injustice; that he was able to *know* that his past “criminal” acts had been a form of rebellion, had constituted a **tendency** and **potential** for undermining the state’s “authority” and the legitimacy of its “law” and prestige.

The prestige of power as the subjective effect of a past deed or reputation, real or fancied, then has a very definite life process. The prestige of the capitalist class inside the u.s. reached its maturity with the close of the 1860-64 civil war. Since that time there have been no serious threats to their power; their excesses have taken on a certain legitimacy through long usage. Prestige bars any serious attack on power. Do people attack a thing they consider with awe, with a sense of its legitimacy?

In the process of things, the prestige of power emerges roughly in that period when power does not have to exercise its underlying basis — violence. Having proved and established itself, it drifts, secure from any serious challenge. Its automatic defense-attack instincts remain alert; small threats are either ignored away, laughed away, or in the cases that may build into something dangerous, slapped away. To the masters of capital, the most dreadful omen of all is revolutionary scientific socialism. The gravedigger evokes fear response. Prestige wanes if the first attacks on its power base find it wanting. Prestige dies when it cannot prevent further attacks upon itself. — Jackson, *Blood in My Eye*

To kill the prestige of the state is, first of all, to kill the image of its legitimacy in the minds of the people. To transform the “criminal mentality” into a revolutionary mentality is, first of all, to destroy within the minds of “criminals”/colonial subjects the sense of awe in which they hold the oppressive state.

For George to become first the Political Prisoner, and then a Prisoner of War, he had to move beyond the mere understanding of objective economic law and its relationship to “crime”; he had to begin *applying* his knowledge in revolutionary activity aimed toward changing the world, toward changing these objective economic laws and eradicating their effect upon the people. We know George today as a *revolutionary* because he educated himself and then went on to change existing circumstances.

If we were to leave the objective analysis/understanding of the economic basis of “crime” and proceed no further, we end up legitimizing the dope pushers in our communities, the pimps and other backward elements who engage in such activity because of the circumstances caused by the present economic order. If we don’t move beyond an explanation of objective socio-economic conditions and consequently don’t move beyond the acceptance of “criminal” activity on the part of “lumpen” as somehow honorable and inherently revolutionary, simply because they *reflect* the present state of property relations, what we will end up doing is condoning those relations in practice if not in words. We will end up accepting the ideology behind those relations as well.

Revolution within a modern industrial capitalist society can only mean the overthrow of all existing property relations and the destruction of all institutions that *directly or indirectly* support the existing property relations. It must include the total suppression of *all* classes and *individuals* who *endorse* the present state of property relations *or who stand to gain from it*. Anything less than this is reform.

— Jackson, *Blood in My Eye*

And this applies not only to those who rule, to the monopoly capitalists, the world runners. It applies to the lumpen as well.

Actually, for those who are not incorporated into the system, for whatever reasons, (capitalist) society provides its own alternatives — organized crime. In the ghetto this alternative is legitimized by the fact that so many people are forced to engage in at least petty illegal activity in order to secure a living income. The pervasiveness of the lucrative numbers racket and dope peddling rings further enhances organized criminality in the eyes of ghetto youth. Social scientists have observed that the role of criminal is one model to which such youth can reasonably aspire. It provides a realistic “career objective,” certainly more realistic

than hoping to become a diplomat or a corporation executive. Consequently, many ghetto youths turn to illegal activity — car theft, pimping, prostitution, housebreaking, gambling, dope pushing, etc. — as a way of earning an income. Those who don't turn to crime still come into contact with and are affected by the mystique of organized crime, a mystique which is widespread in the ghetto. This mystique asserts that it is possible to spit in the face of the major legal and moral imperatives of (American capitalist) society and still be a financial success and achieve power and influence.

To the extent that the Panthers were successful in penetrating the hard core of the ghetto and recruiting black youth, it would seem that they would be forced to confront the social implications of organized crime and its meaning for black liberation. They were well equipped to do this, since many of their own activists and leaders — such as Cleaver — were ex-criminals. Cleaver did attempt to present such an analysis shortly before he disappeared from public view...but he did not take his analysis far enough and consequently his conclusions only served to confuse the matter further.

Numerous sociological studies have shown that in many respects organized crime is only the reverse side of American business. It provides desirable — though proscribed — goods and services, which are not available to the public through “normal” business channels. And, although there is much public ranting against crime, organized crime — and it must be organized to succeed as a business — enjoys a certain degree of immunity from prosecution due to the collusion of police and public officials. Moreover, organized crime constantly seeks — as would any good corporation — to expand and even legitimize its own power, *but it has no serious motive to revamp the present social structure because it is that structure, with all its inherent flaws and contradictions, which provides a climate in which organized crime can flourish.* Hence, it comes as no surprise that in at least one major riot (in Baltimore), police recruited local criminals to help quell the rebellion. The criminals gladly collaborated with the cops because heavy looting during the riot had seriously depressed prices for stolen goods and otherwise disrupted the illegal business operations upon which the criminals depended for their livelihood. (This has also proven a factor in prison struggles, where revolutionary activity is frowned upon because money can't be made in dope sales if the camp is locked-up.)

Cleaver in his analysis, however, misread the social function of organized crime. In speeches and articles, he voiced approval of such underworld notables as Al Capone and Machine Gun Kelly on the grounds that their criminal activities were instrumental in building the present power of ethnic groups such as the Italians and the Irish. He concluded that beneath the public facade there is a history of intense struggle for ethnic group power in the urban centers of America, and that organized criminal activity has played an important part in advancing the status of various groups. But Cleaver failed to note that *organized crime has sought to advance itself totally within the framework of the established society.* It seeks more power for itself, and as a side effect it may bring more money into the hands of this or that ethnic group, but *organized crime is far from being a revolutionary force.* On the contrary, its social function is to provide an informally sanctioned outlet for impulses that officially are outlawed. It thereby acts to uphold and preserve the present social order.

Cleaver's analysis, to the extent that it reflected Panther thinking, revealed the organization's uncertainty about its objectives. This problem stemmed from an inadequate analysis of the manifold ways in which the American social structure absorbs and neutralizes dissent...

— Robert L. Allen, *Black Awakening in Capitalist America*

There is a scene/sequence in *Battle of Algiers* where Ali Aponte, the ex-criminal, the revolutionary nationalist and member of the F.L.N., confronts “lumpen”/criminal elements who are “surviving the best way they know how” — under the *existing* circumstances. Ali makes this confrontation in accordance with the F.L.N. view that a weak and disorganized, demoralized and diseased people cannot successfully attack and defeat the enemy.

The pimps/dope pushers and otherwise backward elements were asked, warned, encouraged to find other means of survival which would be more in tune with the needs and direction of the people, and the national liberation struggle. The backward elements refused, resisted the transformation of their mentalities and thus placed themselves squarely in the path of the nation's progress. Ali Aponte responded to this refusal, to this blocking of progress and national salvation, with a short burst from his Thompson.

Ali Aponte, the former bandit who had been politicized in prison and made a conscious choice to turn his guns against the external enemy, as well as internal parasites, breaks the hindrances on the advancement of the people's revolutionary momentum.

What we've said about the need for conscious awareness and conscious activity in order for there to be a transformation of the “criminal mentality” into a revolutionary mentality, also applies to the definition of Political Prisoners.

We think that Howard Moore's definition of Political Prisoners as quoted by George in *Blood in My Eye* is insufficient:

All black people, wherever they are, whatever their crimes, even crimes against other blacks, are political prisoners because the system has dealt with them differently than with whites. Whitey gets the benefit of every law, every loophole, and the benefit of being judged by his peers — other white people. Blacks don't get the benefit of any such jury trial by peers. Such a trial is almost a cinch to result in the conviction of a black person, and it's a conscious political decision that blacks don't have those benefits...

This definition is cool for helping to explain the colonial relationship that blacks have to amerikkka as a people. But it fails to lay out the true and proper criterion for Political Prisoners. **Practice** is that criterion. Political Prisoners are revolutionaries; they are conscious and active servants of the people. Political Prisoners direct their energies toward the enemies of the people — they do not commit “crimes” against the people. Political Prisoners are Revolutionary Cadre; they are “fighting men and women” *from among the people*. While they are a “part” of the people, distinctions must be made between them and the colonized masses as a whole.

In a similar way, we understand that the success of our struggle demands a theoretical clarity, a preciseness, as to just who “the people” are in our analysis of our dominated nation. Serious revolutionary nationalist struggle demands that we begin devoting some attention to our eventual responsibilities as members of a self-governing, independent state.

We also find in Chapter V some paragraphs of interest from the point of view of political theory. In one of them it is stated, in no ambiguous terms, what people belonged and what people did not belong to the “people” of Guinea-Bissau at the time of the armed struggle. In a subsequent paragraph we encounter the theoretical view of the PAIGC with regard to the problem of how to define the “state” and its tasks. This problem is of some importance in the present context, as the PAIGC — with good reason — defined itself and the institutional structures evolving under its direction precisely as an emerging state.

To define “the people” in a way that makes sense from the point of view of political theory is not as easy as it might seem. The concept has strongly positive evaluative connotations in general, but particularly so within the kind of ideological perspective embraced by the PAIGC. As a political and theoretical concept “the people” usually refers to an abstract category rather than simply to all human beings inhabiting a certain territory. In the PAIGC guidelines the problem is brought up in connection with discipline, the guiding principle of which is that all members of the PAIGC must “respect the people.” The following paragraphs dealing with this problem deserve to be quoted in their entirety:

It is always necessary to develop and to strengthen the best relations possible between the armed forces and the people. Every fighting man must be aware that he is the son of the people, serving the people. Every individual within the population must be aware that our fighting men are the sons of the people, defending, arms in hand, the sacred interests of our people against the Portuguese colonialists.

No fighting man and no party member in position of responsibility has the right to use arms in order to frighten the people or in order to obtain personal advantages against the interests of the people. The fighting men must live in the midst of the people, as their son, and defender, and the people must be his first and principal support.

The people, for us, are any and all of the children of our land who support our struggle against Portuguese colonialism, and who cooperate either overtly or covertly with our party. Those who are against the struggle and against the party, those who serve the Portuguese colonialists or in any other way seek to destroy our party, do not deserve to be counted among our people. They are not our people.

This is an openly normative definition of “the people.” It is particularly interesting because of its frankness, which must be understood against the background of the context where it has been formulated — i.e., in a text giving direct guidance and instructions for practical political work. The concreteness of the formulation, necessary because of the context, has also made the definition exceptionally clarifying. If we wish to express the idea in more abstract terms, related to the PAIGC’s general theoretical and ideological analysis presented earlier in this chapter, the same principle might be formulated somewhat as follows: those who consciously refuse to take part in the historical process of development of their own country do not belong to the people.

The second problem of definition mentioned above is brought up within brackets, in connection with the necessity to “suppress with rapidity and justice all actions that are against the interests of the party and the struggle, and consequently also against the interests of our people.” Within the brackets we find the following statement:

As the party functions as a state in the process of development, we have in our hands today effective means of stopping those who commit crimes. The fundamental characteristic of a state is its ability to suppress those who act against the interests of that state. Our interests, the interests of our party, which directs our state, these interests are also the interests of our people: complete liberation, peace and progress in Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde.

— from Amílcar Cabral’s general guidelines to PAIGC cadre; quoted in Lars Rudebeck, *Guinea-Bissau: A Study of Political Mobilization*, Scandinavian Institute of Afrikan Studies, and available from AfrikanaPublishing Company

Really, everything said up to now has been intended to emphasize, to impress upon larger numbers of Political Prisoners, the fact that we're talking about **Independence**, and independence, self-determination, statehood, implies and requires a better understanding of our goal, the necessary methods and strategy needed to achieve it, and the particular kinds of accountability we have.

"Prestige bars any serious attack on power. Do people attack a thing they consider with awe, with a sense of its legitimacy?"

While destroying the legitimacy of the enemy, we must establish our own! The allegiance of the people must pass from the enemy state to New Afrika, to the New Afrikan People's Republic.

Ali Aponte's "military" activity was political activity, was inspired by, complemented and was guided by the politics of the F.L.N.; was guided by the new revolutionary nationalist theory of the emerging Algerian People's State.

Ali Aponte could make no serious attack on the power of the colonialist state until its prestige was destroyed. And this destruction of the colonialist state's prestige and its substitution by the prestige, the legitimacy of the people's state — this does not take place all at once, but is a process; it builds in stages. Decreeing that dope pushers must find other means of survival is a part of that process. Enforcing the decree is a part of that process. Satisfying the needs of the people, involving the people in the actual control of their own lives, moving with the people in seizing and using and further developing control of the productive forces and the means of production is the process in its essence.

Ali Aponte's elimination of pimps and dope pushers was the fulfillment of a "state function." When he abandoned his "criminal mentality" he became one of the most responsible members of the revolutionary people's state.

When the "average" Afrikan prisoner/person (colonial subject) in amerikkka talks about "getting over" or "getting what's their," they are talking about "getting over" *in amerikkka* and about getting "their" piece of the amerikkkan "pie." The prestige of the colonialist state is therefore still intact.

And, too many of us Political Prisoners don't yet fully comprehend the significance of this fact for revolutionary theory and practice — that is, for revolutionary nationalist theory and practice.

## II

Ali Aponte, ex-bandit, aspiring revolutionary, was formally politicized in prison, made a general commitment to the people, a particular commitment to the F.L.N. — both of which had to first base themselves on a commitment to himself.

We come to a scene in the film where we see Ali Aponte after his release from prison, about to carry out an order, using the gun for the first time in the conscious commission of a revolutionary rather than a "criminal"/personal act.

In brief: he's been told to walk where he'll be met by a Sister carrying a piece inside a basket. He's to approach the Sister, take the piece, and approach a pig from behind, correct him, return the piece to the Sister's basket, and then space.

Rather than follow these instructions, Ali takes the piece and jumps in front of the pig, waving the piece and running off at the mouth. When his lungs are tired and his ego satisfied, he pulls the trigger only to learn that the piece is empty.

Ali had been put through a test which revealed more than it was designed to.

There are many factors involved in the process of successful revolutionary struggle, in a successful party or organization. Only two of these factors are discipline and security. Discipline and security are concerns of parties and organizations. But parties and organizations are composed of individuals. It follows that discipline and security are concerns of each individual member of a party or organization. What happens to the party happens to each member, and vice versa.

Ali was being tested to see, among other things, if he would kill a pig. Not to see only if he had the heart to do so, but to make sure he wasn't a pig or in pig employ or a pig sympathizer. Ali went back and screamed on comrades because they had given him an empty piece. It was pointed out to him that the issue was not the empty piece, but his failure to follow orders. This failure endangered not only Ali as an individual but also endangered the entire party.

Of course, in a general sense, any failure to follow instructions demonstrates a lack of one or a combination of several things. In this case, we think Ali demonstrated that his commitment to himself, the people, and the organization was at that point still primarily emotional. When he jumped in front of the pig, he did so because he wanted to be seen. For him, at that point, his commitments were based heavily on the fact that the colonialists wouldn't "see him as a man, as a human being," etc. He wanted to be heard, to be recognized — **by the oppressor!** As slaves, colonial subjects, we tend not to feel worthy unless the oppressor in some way acknowledges our existence. When Ali jumped in front of the pig, he demonstrated that emotionalism in commitments is one of the major hindrances in the development of the degree of sophistication we need for success. He demonstrated that at that point the struggle for him was not yet a struggle for power, a struggle for self-government and for seizure of property.

Tests of the kind mentioned here, as well as other kinds, will continue to be necessary. An understanding of and a practice of discipline and adequate security are things that more attention should have been devoted to before Ali was released from prison. While Ali was in prison was the time when more systematic attention should have been devoted to combating emotional commitments and related lingerings of a colonial mentality operating on revolutionaries and potential revolutionaries.

We see this in Algeria, but most of us see it better in places like Guinea-Bissau, Angola and Zimbabwe: Cadre are sent to schools.

PAIGC cadre spent years in their school in Conakry before they returned and began their work with the people. In other countries where national liberation struggles were and are taking place, the leading bodies in these struggles had schools established inside and outside the country where ideological and military training took place. ZANU cadre are so trained in Tanzania; our cadre are being and will be trained in places like Stateville, Trenton, San Quentin, Attica and Angola, La.; our cadre are in what we must consciously recognize as training schools in Bedford Hills, Jackson, Terre Haute, Dwight, Atlanta and Alderson and all other prisons and jails in amerikkka. I don't mean recognizing these places as cadre schools, as ideological and technical revolutionary nationalist institutes, only when we write position papers and propaganda leaflets. We must follow the advice of Bro. Sundiata Acoli:

The jails (and prisons) are the Universities of the Revolutionaries and the finishing schools of the Black Liberation Army. Come Brothers and Sisters, and meet Assata Shakur. She is holding seminars in "Getting Down," "Taming the Paper Tiger," and "The Selected Works of Zayd Malik Shakur." So Brothers and Sisters do not fear jail (and prison). Many of you will go anyway — ignorance will be your crime. Others will come — awareness their only crime. — Sundiata Acoli, "From The Bowels of the Beast: A Message," *Break De Chains*

The prisons must truly become Universities, Cadre Training Centers. There must be *planned, systematic* programs to meet us when we arrive behind the walls. Seminars are part of a well-thought-out, concretized curriculum. Organized.

Get as deeply into this as possible, because it's really the most meaningful thing likely to happen in the present and future of the "prison movement." Not the human rights of prisoners and the struggles over these, but the ideological and technical training of revolutionary and potential revolutionaries.

If struggles over human rights in prisons are consciously linked to and guided by the need to turn the prisons into training centers, then prison struggles over human rights fall short of meeting their goal.

The fact is that human rights cannot be won in prisons. Prisons and the ability to obtain and exercise human rights in them is an outright contradiction.

What we recognize today as the "prison movement" has never been a movement with the ultimate aim or emphasis on human rights for prisoners. Read George again!

"The 'Prison Movement,' the August 7th movement and all similar efforts educate the people in the **illegitimacy** of establishment power and *hint* at the ultimate goal of revolutionary consciousness at every level of struggle. The goal is always the same: the creation of an infrastructure capable of fielding a people's army."

The prisons in amerikkka must become examples of the ultimate goal of revolutionary consciousness. The "prison movement" has to become an example of what we must do at every level of struggle. At every level of struggle it must be understood that human rights must be **taken**, not granted. We can only have human rights by overthrowing the enemy.

Struggles for human rights in or out of prisons must be clearly seen as tactical struggles. As tactics, they must be subordinated to strategy and not seek to substitute themselves in place of strategy. The strategic objective is the creation of an infrastructure capable of fielding a people's army, of waging a people's war — on all levels, political and military.

Build To Win!!!

Atiba

8-26/28-77

Afrikan P.O.W.s  
& the U.N.

From the very birth of the United Nations, Afrikan people all over the world have seen it as being able to serve their interests in their struggles for independence.

At the formation of the U.N.'s predecessor, the League of Nations, Afrikans from inside the u.s. were there appealing the plight of their people in amerikkka and elsewhere in the world. At various periods since that time, groups of Afrikans have petitioned and in other ways sought the concrete assistance of the U.N in resolving the contradiction of Afrikan colonial oppression in the u.s.

In 1951, the Civil Rights Congress presented an historic petition to the U.N. charging amerikkka with practicing the crime of genocide against its Afrikan colonial subjects within its borders. (See *We Charge Genocide* by William Patterson, International Publishers.)

A number of organizations, past and present, have included the call to have U.N.-controlled plebiscites to help Afrikans in amerikkka gain self-determination. And many of us are familiar with Malcolm's call to "take the struggle from the level of 'civil rights' to the level of 'human rights,' and take the man before the world court."

Malcolm's call to take the struggle to the level of "human rights" was really a call for us to take the struggle to the level of demanding our recognition as an oppressed nation; it was in reality a call upon us to seek recognition as a nation with the right to sovereignty.

Although many Afrikan organizations, parties and individuals maintain in their platforms and positions, calls to take our struggle from the "domestic" to the international level, we think it's significant that such words are being put into practice today by Afrikan Prisoners of War.

To recognize Prisoners of War is to recognize them as members of **Nations** - nations which have, or should have, sovereign rights to independent existence, self-government, and a self-controlled national economy.

When we say that we have Afrikans inside the accepted borders of amerikkka, who are Prisoners of war, we are saying that there is a nation of Afrikan people inside these accepted borders; we are saying that this nation of Afrikan people are engaged in a war for their independence.

That Afrikan prisoners have initiated a campaign to present a petition to the U.N. charging amerikkka with using its prisons as instruments of oppression, exploitation and genocide, represents one of the most significant levels of struggle today.

The petition encourages, among other things, that Political Prisoners and Prisoners of War of both oppressor and oppressed nation nationals, receive the same international recognition as the Political Prisoners and Prisoners of War of other sovereign nations throughout the world.

This effort represents not just a particular struggle of P.O.W.'s, but is an aspect of the struggles of all nationally oppressed peoples. Because when we say that Afrikan P.O.W.'s must be recognized as such, and treated as such, we are really saying that all Afrikan people inside the u.s. must be recognized and treated as a nation of oppressed people.

The struggle, on an international level, for the recognition of Afrikan Prisoners of War, is a struggle to have the oppressed Afrikan nation inside the u.s. recognized as such by the world. It's part of the struggle of all Afrikan people, and clearly aims at furthering the process of taking our struggle off the "domestic" level and onto the international level.

To talk of P.O.W.'s, and in particular of Afrikan P.O.W.'s, is a way of building revolutionary nationalist consciousness, and of realizing the liberation of the nation.

Build To Win!!!!

Atiba

8-28-77

## Discussion Paper No. 1

### “Prison Movement” Discussion Paper No. 1: Contributions Toward The National Prisoners Movement

It's widely accepted that with the activities surrounding the anticipated trial of Comrade-Brothers George Jackson, Fleeta Drumgo and John Clutchette, there arose what came to be known as the “prison movement.”

The activities involved in the defense of the Soledad Brothers began in 1970; thus, we use these activities...we use this *period* because we think it sufficiently marks a point in the history of rebellious actions in american prisons when these actions began to take a *qualitative change in character*.

What we mean to say is, the “prison movement” which we say began in the period marked 1970 was and is different in nature from past struggles in america's prisons; the “prison movement” is *qualitatively* different from all past struggles in american prison. This qualitative difference stems from several factors, but each of these factors are related to the escalation of the struggles waged in america by Blacks, Puerto Ricans, and other *oppressed nations* within u.s. borders. Thus, in short, the “prison movement” receives its distinct character from the fact that it began to reflect the rising significance of national liberation struggles within the present u.s. borders.

By reflecting the central role of national liberation struggles within the present u.s. borders, the “prison movement” also began to demonstrate that ideological and theoretical models and concepts traditionally adhered to, now had to be altered, and new analyses had to be made so that both theory and practice could be brought into accord with actual concrete conditions.

It could no longer be held that prisons were simply instruments of “class” rule; that prisons were simply places where the “surplus labor/surplus value” of prisoners was exploited/appropriated by those who rule; it could no longer be accepted that prisons were simply places used by the state to intimidate, coerce and control the “working class” of capitalist society.

None of these could remain the basis of our theory and practice, because it was more clearly understood that america was not *simply* a “capitalist” society. It was more clearly understood that america is an *imperialist* society; it dominates and exploits oppressed nations...and these dominated nations exist not only externally, but within the u.s. borders as well.

From our analysis and understanding of the nature of imperialism, and from our understanding of the relationships which exist between the oppressor nations and oppressed nations, we slowly come to see that it is the struggle of oppressed nations for liberation which play the “leading role” in the world struggle *and* in the struggle now taking place in america.

By the same token, what characterizes struggles in and around prisons in america today is the fact that they are primarily used to destroy, suppress, and contain struggles for national liberation; they are used to commit genocide against oppressed peoples (Blacks, Puerto Ricans, Native Americans, Chicanos, Mexicanos, etc.).

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From the beginning, the “prison movement” was influenced by the struggles taking place on the street, and, at the same time, it exerted its own influence upon struggles taking place outside the walls. National liberation struggles were taking place outside the walls and class struggles were taking place outside the walls. The national liberation struggles were being waged by the peoples or oppressed nations; the class struggles were being waged by the working class of the oppressor nation.

As the degree of repression against the national liberation struggles intensified, and as economic conditions in america worsened, the prisons began to fill. The people who began to fill prisons were disproportionately Third World peoples, pointing up the racist oppression which is characteristic of national liberation struggles. Those whites which began to fill the prisons pointed up (primarily) the economic exploitation which is most characteristic of the class struggle in the oppressor nation.

The “prison movement,” while pointing up the exploitation of prisoners as “workers,” of prisoners as “guinea pigs” in medical experimentation, and as targets for psycho-surgery, and while able to focus on many of the other inhumane, exploitive, oppressive and repressive aspects and conditions in prisons - more than all these, what was pointed up was the connections between these prison conditions and the conditions of the masses of Third World

people in America - oppressed nations struggling for liberation. The “prison movement” was able to point up the connections existing between these prison conditions, the conditions of the masses of oppressed nations within america, and those conditions experienced by other oppressed nations throughout the world.

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As a result of the repression exercised upon the struggles taking place outside the walls in the late sixties and early seventies, leaders and activists in these struggles were captured and imprisoned. These were the political prisoners and prisoners of war. Their initial imprisonment was a result of consciously motivated political actions.

The escalation of struggle outside the walls also resulted in a significant increase in the number of *politicized* prisoners already inside the walls. It is important to note that the “traditional” or “conventional” models and conceptions regard the politicization of these prisoners as a result of their being “lumpen” or “working class.” The fact that they are usually Third World is given only secondary consideration. We can admit that the economic and socio-psychological ties that these politicized prisoners had with the oppressive system were such that they represent the most conscious element among us - the most conscious, that is, of the presently waging, undeclared war between themselves and those who rule. Thus, they are among the most receptive and most responsive to the need to become conscious, active participants in this war. They represent those with the most *potential* to become “the people in uniform.” **BUT**, their politicization resulted primarily from their being members of oppressed nations!

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The relationship existing between the “prison movement” and the overall struggle, the relationship existing between prisoners and people outside the walls supporting struggles in and around prisons, has been and will continue to be a dialectical relationship. This is simply to say that the struggles taking place inside influence those taking place outside, while at the same time the struggles taking place outside influence those taking place inside. This dialectical relationship between the inside and the outside has had several rather distinct phases or levels. What we mean here is that there have been periods when we notice influence flowing from the inside to the outside which tends to heavily *determine* both theory and practice for outside forces, and that there have been distinct periods when influence flowing from the outside to the inside has tended to heavily determine both theory and practice for the inside forces.

But, it is our belief that what has heretofore characterized each of these phases or levels is that the “control” and “direction” of the outside forces has been more or less the norm. This control and direction exercised by the outside forces has occurred even during those phases or levels when the influence was flowing from the inside to the outside.

We believe that we’re approaching (have approached) another phase or level (actually, another stage in the whole movement), where the influence again flows from the inside to the outside. The difference is that prisoners will now be more involved in the direction and control of this influence and the things which this influence gives birth to. In particular, we mean to say that prisoners are/will be the *impetus* for the formation of a national prisoners movement, and will exercise significant control and direction over this national prisoners movement. And, on a more general level, we believe that prisoners will play a significant role in the formation of a national, *revolutionary*, black political party and in the formation of a national, *revolutionary*, black united front.

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We’re talking about moving from the particular to the general - about moving from where we are right now, in the process of organizing the masses of black people, other internally colonized peoples, and contributing to the struggle of the oppressed people of the oppressor nation. We’re talking, more specifically, here, about agitating, educating, and organizing in each prison, so as to build the foundations upon which will stand the national prisoners movement. We’re talking about beginning to lay foundations which will become contributions in the building of a national, revolutionary black political party. We’re talking, also, about beginning to lay foundations for what will become contributions in the building of a national, revolutionary, black united front.

To succeed in each of these objectives, we need organization. We understand that as we level blows against prison walls and the entrenched power of those who rule, we cannot entertain thoughts of decisive battle (the abol-

ishment of prisons [as they now exist], self-determination, socialist reconstruction/society), until we have the requisite power to do so. In order to obtain this power, we must acquire and effectively use the weapon/instrument of organization. Any and all activities initiated by us in this protracted struggle must be organized.

Such organization demands that we be conscious, skilled, disciplined and united in thought and action. It demands fundamental change in our thought and in our practice; it demands the acquisition of a sense of confidence, a belief in our ability to struggle and to win, to break the chains (physical and mental) and go on to build and control a new way of life for ourselves.

Such organization is needed by the movement as a whole - by the masses of the people. Such organization is also needed by those who would help to organize the people. Just as organization is the weapon/instrument that we must have in the struggle to obtain the power that we need to effect revolutionary change, correct ideology/philosophy, theory and practice are the required weapons/instruments we need in order to insure effective organization.

Cadre, vanguard elements, those who are and who aspire to be true revolutionaries and freedom fighters - those who would be true political prisoners and prisoners of war - *these* must be organized. These must be equipped with the most correct/appropriate ideology/philosophy, the most correct/appropriate theory, arising from "concrete analysis of concrete conditions," and tested and enriched by practice.

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The chains that bind us are mental as well as physical. We cannot "organize a sleeping people around specific goals" until awareness and understanding of the need to fight has been achieved - until the **WILL** to fight has been inspired, until the belief that we can win has been acquired.

These mental/psychological chains obscure, mask, and misdescribe the way the real world works. Incorrect philosophical approaches prevent awareness and understanding of real social, political and economic relations. Backward philosophy stifles the growth and development of genuine revolutionary consciousness, causes repeated confusion and frustration, apathy and disillusionment, conceals the need that we have to fight, dulls the will to fight, erodes our confidence and impedes effective organization for revolutionary national liberation struggle.

At bottom of our difficulties in getting people to struggle in and around prisons, at bottom of our difficulties in getting people to struggle for national liberation and the destruction of capitalist relations, is backward philosophy. The majority of people still cling to beliefs in the appropriateness of american law and the defined purposes and functions of prisons. They still cling to beliefs in the appropriateness and legitimacy of the american system of government and in the right of the oppressor to exercise authority over us. *They still cling to the philosophical perspective which is the foundation for all of this.*

In essence, we're saying that those who are into the "super fly" bags, into the "gangster" bags, the "america the beautiful" bags - all these "bags" and others are realities among us today primarily because we cling to incorrect, backward philosophy. Until our philosophy changes, until our outlook on the world and how it works changes, we will be unable to organize ourselves to carry out effective struggle for national liberation.

As men and women throughout the world organize themselves to engage in revolutionary struggle, as they "consciously remold themselves to remake the world," they necessarily change their philosophies, their ways of thinking about themselves and the world. They adopt new values and discard old ones; their approaches to and relationships with all other people and all institutions on national and international levels are altered, and in most cases completely reversed: where people were dependent, they become independent; where they were passive, they become aggressive and assertive; where they were powerless, they take power into their own hands.

Upon engaging in revolutionary struggles, where people were before kept unaware, unconscious, uncreative and unable to involve themselves in the varied processes and structures aimed at shaping the quality and direction of their lives, they become aware of social/historical laws underlying change, growth and development; they become conscious of themselves as the enforcers of these laws. Their heretofore imprisoned creativity is released, and they involve themselves in every phase and aspect of building and safeguarding new social orders.

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We begin with ourselves. We begin by study and practice. We emphasize, though, that our study must be critical, must independent and creative. The method(s) that we use must be "guides to action" and not "levers for construction."

We begin with ourselves, with study and practice, the result of which will be that advanced elements in each prison will come together, will organize themselves in preparation for their part in organizing the people.

Moving from the particular to the general for captured Brothers and Sisters means first of all coming together where we are. We get ourselves together, and then reach out to the most advanced elements among our fellow captives, among our family and friends - among all those close to us who demonstrate the most potential, the desire and the willingness to learn and to commit themselves to service of the people, to struggle for national liberation.

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As we come together into study groups, collectives, organizations and fronts in the prisons where we are, and as we then move to bring each prison into statewide fronts, we must do so in an organized, systematic manner.

In general, we can say that the means we'll use should be Agitation, Education, Organization.

As a rule, Agitation is done when we talk about the brutal pig, the bad food, the absent doctor and other bad conditions. When we agitate, we talk about the recent shooting of a black youth by pigs on the street; the reasons for drugs in our communities; for prostitution; for huge numbers of our people on welfare rolls; for miseducation of our children in the schools controlled by the enemy, etc. When we agitate, we simply stir general discussion, arouse feelings, excite and disturb the calm and tranquil among us. We move against potential threats or actual conditions of a more immediate nature. But none of these *alone* will increase understanding, instill revolutionary consciousness and commitment, or unseat the emperor.

First we Agitate, then we Educate. After we've stirred discussion, aroused feelings, excited and disturbed the general calm and tranquility, we begin to direct the discussion toward specifics. We harness the energy and intensity of the feelings we've activated and begin to shape revolutionary consciousness. When we educate, we begin to instruct each other and those around us into the why's and how's of struggle; we impart knowledge; we teach, train, bestow and share skills; we distill method - all of which implies *planning*.

From Education we move to Organization. When we organize, we begin to give a definite structure to our activities; we create a coherent unity and arrange all things in systematic ways, according to plans. We shape into a whole the many heretofore loose, interdependent parts.

All of this Agitation, Education and Organization, while aiming towards the general objective, must be based on the particular, i.e., on the actual conditions prevailing in each prison. The issues around which much of our activity will be based will differ from prison to prison and from state to state. Also, the conditions under which we'll have to carry out our work will differ - some prisons will offer a relative mobility, while others will be increasingly repressive.

Atiba  
12/76

## Discussion Paper No. 2

### Introduction

In December of 1976, a first draft of our “Contributions Towards The National Prisoners Movement” was sent to ‘rades outside for their criticism. In their response, they raised questions which we felt had to be dealt with.

We sat down to write a **LETTER** to these ‘rades and it just happened that the letter stretched to thirty-nine hand-written pages, which took us three days to complete. The letter was purely spontaneous and “off the top of our heads”; we resorted to books/reference only to quote from the several books mentioned and to get exact dates for several events.

Copies of this original letter were made and distributed to all SPO members and other comrades. Even now we’re not sure how, but it happened that we felt others would find the letter interesting and useful. We decided to make minor changes in the letter, make a limited number of copies, and distribute it to selected groups and individuals around the country as Discussion Paper #2.

In preparing the letter for this selected distribution as a discussion paper, we wanted to maintain as much of the original form as possible, while trying to make several points made in the original more clear. We are aided in this effort because we had come into possession of several books and other materials which touched on issues raised in the letter and helped to make our understanding of them more clear.

Many of those who received the paper told others about them, and we began to get many responses, comments and criticisms, and requests from many parts of the country, from inside and outside the walls, for copies of both papers. The publication of this pamphlet is in response to these growing requests.

Since nearly a year has passed since the letter was originally written, and more than six months since the minor revision of it as a discussion paper, we considered doing another revision for this pamphlet.

There are still many points which, ideally, more attention could be given to. But since over the past several months and weeks we’ve discussed the papers more, and come into possession of still more material which has broadened our perspective on the issues raised, we feel that to try another “revision” would in fact be to write completely new and different papers.

Of course, what we have to say here shouldn’t be considered our “final word” or as “definitive” views. They are presented to help begin discussion on the questions; they are presented as only one means of helping prisoners and people outside the walls to build channels of communication and as further contributions to the building of a national movement among revolutionaries who happen to be in amerikkkan prisons.

Two criticisms which we’ve received have been: 1) that the papers tend to “subordinate class struggle to national liberation struggle”; and 2) that there are questions as to whether or not black people in amerikkka — New Afrikan people actually comprise a nation. To deal with these points sufficiently would require separate pamphlets for each, and we can only touch on them here.

One comrade quoted Mao to us as a way of pointing out that we should emphasize “class struggle” rather than “national liberation struggle.” It was pointed out that “In the final analysis, national struggle is a matter of class struggle.” But what is “class struggle”?

We believe that many folks have a misconception of “class struggle.” These folks tend to view “class struggle” only as “the struggle between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie,” or between “the working class and the ruling class,” or between “capital and labor.”

Our understanding is that the struggle between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie is a particular form of “class struggle” which belongs only to a certain historical stage in the overall development of class society; that any form of “class struggle” is dependent upon the level of production within any particular society; that the relations between classes in any particular society are determined by relationships to means of production, by the system of production and distribution, and the particular level of material existence of the various classes.

When confronted with the question of “subordinating class struggle to national struggle,” we felt we had to know first what a “class” is. In the *Selected Works of Marx and Engels*, Vol. 1, p. 65, we found that “...separate individuals form a class only insofar as... they have to carry on a common battle against another class; otherwise they are on hostile terms with each other as competitors...” And in Kwame Nkrumah’s *Class Struggle In Afrika*, p. 17, in somewhat different language: “For in the final analysis, a class is nothing more than the sum total of individuals bound together by certain interests which as a class they try to preserve and protect.”

Our understanding is that classes, class society, class struggle, began with the production/accumulation of surplus during “primitive/communal” society, and the “division of labor,” when it became no longer necessary for all members of the society to engage in production, and when “production for exchange” began to develop alongside “production for use.”

The literature we’ve come across which describes how Marx applied dialectical materialism to socio-historical phenomena, says that “primitive society” was replaced by “slave society,” and this by “feudal society,” which was in turn replaced by “capitalist society.” And we have been given to understand, from this literature, that each of these latter forms of society were “class societies” and that each had a “fundamental contradiction” — expressed in class relations — which was particular to itself: slave and slave-owner; serf and lord; proletariat and bourgeoisie.

We further understand that while the contradiction between slave and slave-owner was the fundamental contradiction in “slave society” *as expressed by class relations*, it was not the fundamental contradiction in “class society” while the contradiction between serf and lord was the fundamental contradiction of “feudal society” as expressed by class relations, it was not the fundamental contradiction of “class society”; and that while the contradiction between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie is the fundamental contradiction in “capitalist society” *as expressed by class relations*, neither is this the fundamental contradiction in “class society.”

Our understanding is that in class society, in the struggle between classes and therefore in “class struggle,” the fundamental contradiction is between the productive forces and the relations of production.

Slave, feudal, and capitalist societies are particular forms of “class society”; the struggles between classes within each of these societies are simply particular *forms* of “class struggle.” We recognize Imperialism as a form of “class society,” and the struggle between the “classes” under imperialism as a particular form of “class struggle.” We recognize that under imperialism, the fundamental contradiction, as expressed by “class” relations, is that between the colonized and the colonizer or, that between the oppressed nation and the oppressor nation. Under *imperialism*, it is not the struggle between “the proletariat and the bourgeoisie”, but the struggle between the oppressed and oppressor nations — national liberation struggle — which expresses the *fundamental* contradiction of imperialism, and which therefore *characterizes “class struggle” under imperialism*.

It has been pointed out to us that: “Once nationalism is taken as the central issue, then a definition that imperialism is national oppression (it isn’t; it is class oppression manifesting itself on a national level — to try to point out the central aspect), leads to a politics in which all is subordinated to national liberation.”

Our response at the time was: “One: it’s not just ‘nationalism’ that we’re talking about, but *revolutionary nationalism*, wars for revolutionary national liberation, anti-imperialism. Two: the central characteristic — the determining and fundamental contradiction of *imperialism* — is national oppression. Three: to say that imperialism is ‘class oppression manifesting itself on a national level’ is nothing but saying that entire nations become classes.”

And once all of the above becomes clear, the next point of attack is that “black folks in amerikkka are not a nation.” In making this claim, folks usually stick Stalin’s criteria in our faces, as if Stalin has the last word on criteria.

We could refer to numerous sources, which to us not only show the unscientific character of Stalin’s criteria, but which would point out a more accurate and scientific definition of the black nation inside U.S. borders, which nation we call New Afrika.

But again, we are trying to be brief here, and to get into a more complete analysis would require more space than we have. We hope, tho, that the following quote from an RNA document will suffice to at least bring Stalin’s criteria into question by those who adhere blindly to it, and also serve to point out to those of us just beginning our study that we don’t — and shouldn’t — depend on Stalin to set the criteria for our national reality, or to validate our national liberation struggle.

**“Afrikans began arriving in what was to become the United States in significant numbers and as a result of being kidnapped, sometime around 1619. Within 40 years the social practice and the laws of the emerging new European nation here made it clear that Afrikans, free and slave, were not to be permitted to join this new white nation, nor were the Afrikans — the majority of whom were slaves — to be allowed in peace and numbers to join the Indian nations here, largely because of the European policy of hunting down ‘fugitive’ slaves.**

**“Thus, the law and custom in North America by 1660 had forced the creation of a new Afrikan nation here. That nation was composed of Afrikans from many different nations and tribes in Afrika, with white**

genes injected by the slavemasters, who almost universally left their children with their Afrikan mothers and the Afrikan group, and with Indian genes. Colonial laws and the practices of oppression by whites created a New Afrikan Nation in the English colonies one hundred years before the U.S. Declaration of Independence. It was a nation founded upon and cemented by the essentially homogeneous Afrikan cultural background and an essentially similar interaction of all the Afrikan peoples here with an essentially homogeneous oppression.”

We encourage all readers of this pamphlet to deal with it critically — as with all study. We encourage you to send us your comments, criticisms, etc., and to begin establishing channels of communication with kamps in your state and all across the kountry, inside and outside the walls. We also encourage you to begin putting your own thoughts on paper, and in this way help to give the people sources of information and inspiration: part of the struggle remains a war to capture the minds of the masses, and to create an awareness of our oppression and a revolutionary consciousness.

Our reference to the Soledad Brothers and to Attica (Sept. '71) is really reference to a **period** (1970-1971) which we used for the purpose of our analysis, because we think that this **period** marks that point at which a clear, qualitative difference in the character of “prison struggles” can be noticed.

In Revolutionary Solidarity  
Build To Win

Atiba

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Opposition and struggle between ideas of different kinds constantly occur within the Party; this is a reflection within the Party of contradictions between classes and between the new and the old in society. If there were no contradictions in the Party and no ideological struggles to resolve them, the Party’s life would come to an end. *-On Contradiction, Mao Tse-tung*

## Discussion Paper No. 2: The “Prison Movement” And National Liberation

### I

#### Statement

It’s widely accepted that with the activities surrounding the anticipated trial of Comrade-Brothers George Jackson, Fleeta Drumgo and John Clutchette, there arose what came to be known as the “prison movement.”

From the beginning, the “prison movement” was both influenced by, and exerted its own influence upon, the general, overall struggles taking place in america — national liberation and class struggles.

#### Response

It was pointed out that the “prison movement” did not arise around Comrade George Jackson. That statement is not factual and it would be negating the movement/struggle that has been occurring in prisons since the 1800’s. The prison movement intensified with the Soledad Brothers, but in no sense did it “arise.”

#### Reply to the Response

We think that the criticism/response offered toward the statement is unsound. It’s our belief that the failure to understand where we’re “coming from” in the statement is essentially due to the reluctance to abandon conventional theoretical models regarding the definition of the role of prisons in america, in particular; and to the failure to abandon incorrect ideological and theoretical models regarding revolutionary and national liberation struggle in america in general — it’s evidence of a failure to view things dialectically and to make concrete analysis of concrete conditions.

To understand how the “prison movement” arose during the period marked by the Soledad Brothers’ defense activities and the Attica Rebellion, it is necessary to abandon such “lines” on prisons in america as espoused by Jessica Mitford or the Revolutionary Communist Party; it necessitates new, critical, and independent analyses, rather than the continued servile, sterile dependence upon ideological and theoretical constructions which address the peculiar conditions of oppressed nations paternalistically, and say little more than that “prisons are the tools of the capitalist ruling class”; or “prisoners are members of the working class,” etc.

We understand the need to learn the history of prisons in america (i.e., where the first one was built); we understand the need to learn how prisons have been used in america over the past several hundred years (i.e., from total isolation of prisoners, to putting them to work on farms and in shops). But such facts without appropriate relationship to the general political, economic and social conditions prevailing throughout america at successive stages of its development, will serve to hinder rather than inspire struggle; will serve to distort rather than clarify our thinking.

What we mean is, we cannot have, today, a complete, correct understanding of prisons and/or struggles in prisons in america, unless we pay proper attention to the presence and the struggles of Native Americans, of New Afrikans (hereinafter simply “Afrikans”) in america. Which is to say that we must begin our analysis with the understanding that several nations exist on the north american continent — that america is a “prisonhouse of nations.”

No correct understanding of prisons and struggles within the present u.s. borders can be had unless we begin by understanding that the development and function of the entire “criminal justice system” has been just as significantly determined by the struggles of oppressed nations as it has by the “needs and fears of the employers” as the “working class” rose in rebellion.

To arrive at a definition and a shared conception of the “prison movement,” it’s necessary for us to know what a **movement** is. For us, a “movement” is defined as: a particular instance or manner of moving; a particular tendency or particular trend in movement; a series of organized activities working toward a specific objective; an organized effort to promote or attain a specific end.

We made reference to the Soledad Brothers’ defense activities because we think they serve to sufficiently mark the end of one period of struggle and the beginning of another; because we think that, together with the Attica Rebellion, they mark the point where a qualitative change occurred in the character of struggles in prisons within the

u.s. borders. What we mean is, while there have surely been “struggles in prisons since the 1800’s,” these struggles did not constitute a **movement**; did not represent a homogeneous, distinct, significant and influential phenomenon until the period marked by Soledad/Attica, and therefore did not constitute a “prison movement.”

We give due recognition to all those struggles in prisons before 1970-71; to all those defense activities surrounding past prison struggles and/or individuals accused of opposing the law and order of the oppressor — but we maintain that none of these constituted a **movement** and therefore did not constitute the “prison movement.” We give due recognition to the fact that many people within the u.s. borders, past and present, had/have a particular understanding of the role of prisons in american (capitalist/imperialist) society. But such an understanding is not a **movement**. There have been instances when struggles in prisons, prison conditions in general, and the defense activities surrounding persons accused of opposing the law and order of the oppressor have been used (either principally or opportunistically) as temporary issues in the political “careers” of groups and/or individuals. There have been articles, pamphlets and books written on prisons and prisoners, which have gone toward enlightening people on prisons and generally raising political consciousness. But none of this constituted a **movement**. We also recognize that during the 1800’s, the role of prisons and the struggles taking place in prisons had a very direct and intimate relationship to Afrikan people, and this relationship is fundamental to our definition of the “prison movement.” But again, we maintain that the “prison movement” did not come into being until the period marked by Soledad/Attica.

All of the “struggles in prisons since the 1800’s” have, in one way or another, contributed to and influenced the present character and development of the “prison movement.” They were actions which were *quantitative* in character...they were struggles which represent those quantitative changes which gradually accumulate and eventually result in *qualitative* change. Thus, the “intensity” you refer to in your response did not merely represent continuous growth, as you seem to feel, but represented a discontinuous *leap*, development, and caused the transformation of “struggles in prisons since the 1800’s” into the “prison movement.”

Your response implies a mechanistic conception of struggle. It seems that you expect the struggles in prisons today to be the “same” as those of the past. Thus you deny or overlook “internal motion” and the possibility of new things arising. It’s similar to saying that “all wars are the same” or that “all nationalism is reactionary.” We can’t forget, or ignore, the necessity for paying attention to new things, to things that are rising. We can’t just concentrate on what has existed or on what exists at the present. We have to give due consideration to that which is coming into being. Reality is always concrete.

Therefore, when we begin to make a concrete analysis of prisons and struggles in prisons in america, we think we should investigate each separate struggle concretely. We should also check out the social, political and economic conditions prevailing throughout the country at successive periods. An analysis of this type would necessarily include a comparison of regions (i.e., struggles in northern prisons compared to those in southern prisons. and the particular conditions prevailing in both areas). It should also make special note of the national composition of prisons (i.e., the percentage of members of oppressed nations [Native American nationals, Afrikan nationals, oppressor nation nationals] in each prison and/or area).

Central to our position that a qualitative change took place in prison struggles at the period marked by Soledad/Attica is the fact that they are now intimately related to the liberation struggles of oppressed nations within the u.s. borders, particularly to the national liberation struggles of Afrikans in the u.s. During (and since) the 1800’s, while no prison **movement** existed, there were struggles in prisons, and some attention was given to these struggles, to the role that prisons were then playing in the u.s. But, the attention given to these struggles, the interpretation of the role of prisons in the u.s. — what was given emphasis — usually depended upon who was making the analysis, why they were doing so, and at what point in time.

We’ve been made familiar with quotes from Mother Jones and Eugene Debs, for instance, which relate to prisons; we’ve been made familiar with material which emphasizes the “slave labor and slave wages” of prisoners, and which generally gives an economist perspective to prison and prison struggles. Such material tends to favor reform; if it approaches a revolutionary perspective, it does so from the perspective of the “dominant culture,” i.e., revolutionaries of the oppressor nation.

But in the 1800’s Afrikans in the u.s. were viewing prisons from a perspective which emphasized their national oppression. At that point in time, attention was naturally drawn to the South, since that’s where most of us were, and where the prison system and the “criminal justice system” affected/effected us most. For instance, in 1890, Afrikans proposed the formation of a National Afro-American League. Among the seven reasons given for the formation of the League was “The odious and demoralizing penitentiary system in the South, with its chain gangs,

convict leases and indiscriminate mixing of males and females.”

And, in 1901, DuBois was writing that “Despite compromise, war, and struggle, the (Afrikan) is not free. In well-nigh the whole rural South the Black farmers are peons, bound by law and custom to an economic slavery from which the only escape is death or the penitentiary.” We simply cite these to draw attention to some historical facts which must be considered by us today in making both general analysis/theory upon which we base our practice in national liberation struggle, and in making a particular analysis/theory upon which we base struggle in and around prisons in america. In 1890 there was “indiscriminate mixing of males and females” in the prisons of the South; today, there is Comrade-Sister Assata Shakur in an all-male prison in New Jersey. Check it out.

Before 1863, the plantation was the “prison” for Afrikan people in the u.s. Whatever was happening in u.s. prisons before this point was, for all practical purposes, centered solely around the nationals of the oppressor nation. After 1863, Afrikans began to “assume a new status” in america; we were no longer simply chattel, property — no longer simply “outside” of the oppressor nation — and thus found ourselves in the condition described by DuBois.

Thus, it was in the 1800’s that struggles in and around american prisons began to change in character from any previous struggles. This change was not *simply*, not *primarily* caused by “the rise of the working class,” etc., but by the change in the composition of prison populations, especially in the South. It was influenced by the changes taking place throughout america as the country “adjusted itself” to the new colonial status of Afrikans.

After 1863, the american “criminal justice system” began to assume a new role in the control not simply of the “working class,” but in the control of oppressed nations. As more and more Afrikans began to fill southern prisons, the role/function of these prisons changed. Southern prisons began to be looked upon differently and responded to differently than northern prisons. Consequently, struggles in prisons *before* the 1800’s, during the 1800’s, and after the 1800’s, must be seen in accordance with the many variables surrounding each period.

We had a particular relationship to prisons in america during the 1800’s, and prison struggles had a particular character during the 1800’s. Our relationship to prisons in america during the 1800’s was more or less restricted to those prisons in the South, where most of us were.

But we began to move from the South and into the North (and West). Thus, we began to assume a particular relationship to prisons in the North as well. And, as we began to fill northern (and western) prisons, prison struggles in general began to change. We’re talking especially about the past 45 to 50 years.

We contend that the most notable changes in the nature of struggles in american prisons began to take place in the late sixties and early seventies, and that it was during this period that the prison **movement** arose.

What began to distinguish the struggles in prisons during the sixties and seventies from those which preceded them, and thus gave rise to the “prison **movement**” was the relationship that these new struggles had/have to national liberation struggles in general, and to the Afrikan liberation struggle in particular. We think that the years 1954 to 1970 had a unique influence upon struggles in prison and thus contributed to giving the “prison movement” its distinct character.

Afrikan people in america have always comprised a nation, and our struggle has always been one aiming toward national liberation, independence, self-determination. If this fact has not always been clear to us and/or to others, it simply stands as evidence of our national oppression, of our lack of power to determine our own destiny, to define our own situation and goals. We regard what is sometimes called the “black protest movement” or the “civil rights movement” as simply a particular expression, phase or stage of the national liberation struggle that we have been waging for several hundred years.

The years 1954 and 1955 are significant, since they serve to mark a distinctive stage of the struggle for national liberation. In these years seeds which had been planted centuries before, decades before, years and even days before, began to blossom. In these years also, seeds were planted as well.

In May, 1954, the u.s. supreme court declared “racial segregation” in u.s. public schools unconstitutional; this decision was followed in May, 1955, by an order to “integrate” u.s. public schools “with all deliberate speed.” Among other things, these acts forced a recognition of the continued existence of the national oppression of Afrikans in america. During the proceedings and as part of the legal argument before the court, it was stated that “slavery (national oppression) is perpetuated” by the laws requiring “separate but equal” public school facilities. The decision and order by the court did not cease the perpetuation of “slavery” in america, which is to say that the national oppression of Afrikan people remained a reality.

But, just as the cause of the decision and order lay in the contradiction between the oppressed and oppressor nations, the supreme court action served to sharpen this contradiction, to heighten our consciousness and to escalate the level of national liberation struggle.

The Montgomery Bus Boycott of December, 1955 — this, too, was a part of what went into marking this period as a distinctive stage of struggle. The Boycott arose as a consequence of national oppression, and it gave rise to new expressions of the fundamental contradiction within the u.s. borders — that between the oppressed Afrikan nation and the oppressor nation. For the purpose of our analysis, we hold that it was the action taken by the u.s. supreme court and the Montgomery Bus Boycott that mark that period which gave rise to the “civil rights movement.”

Again, this “civil rights movement” was simply one particular expression, one particular form that the national liberation struggle has assumed. And, even within this “civil rights movement” there are phases or stages which can be distinguished. But, taken as a whole, the “civil rights movement” gave rise to and represented a new level of struggle; it represented and gave rise to a new level of consciousness. As this movement progressed, we began to see that this method, this means, was not entirely sufficient to meet our end, our objective, our need and desire. As we moved into the sixties we began to talk less about “civil rights” and more about “human rights” — less about “democratic rights” and “integration” and more about revolutionary nationalism.

(We think it necessary to note here that what some might regard as an “assertion” of revolutionary nationalism was in fact a re-assertion. El Hajj Malik [Malcolm X] was not the first nationalist, and the RNA was not the first body of Afrikans to lay claim to land in North America. The abandonment of the “civil rights movement” arose from internal causes/forces, from the very nature of the relationship of Afrikans to america, i.e., from the contradictory unity of imperialism and colonialism, and as a result of the contradictions within the very essence of this process.)

From our own experience we can recount the type of activity occurring in prisons in the middle and late sixties. Particularly at the opening of the sixties, the struggles in prisons in america differed little from those of the 1800’s. To be more precise, these struggles at the beginning of the sixties were more similar, taken as a whole, to those struggles of the 1800’s than they were to subsequent struggles — to those many struggles which took place within the context of the “prison movement.”

As before, there were strikes of all sorts, work stoppages, petitions, riots; individual and relatively organized acts of resistance to racism, bad conditions, etc. Many of these received some coverage by the rulers’ media, and some received support from the outside (legal, concerned community residents, family and friends of those prisoners involved, etc.)

But more often than not, anything occurring in prisons at that point never became known beyond the walls. More often than not — what was characteristic of that stage — was that even if actions became known beyond the walls, it was simply a “news item.” There was the air of the “exotic” about prison strikes and riots. There was no permanent, organized body in the community (beyond a few lawyers of “prison reform groups”) and few, if any, inside the walls.

And, as we say, these actions inside the walls were more “exotic” than anything else. This is not to say that they did not then represent clear political questions, in themselves. But it does say that, taken as a whole, prisoners themselves did not recognize or articulate such questions and make connections. The community, taken as a whole, didn’t either. There was little recognition or articulation of the fact that strikes or riots in one prison had some intimate, direct relationship with things happening in other prisons. There was no recognition or articulation of the fact that what happened in any prison was related to things happening in the community. There was, for all practical purposes, no talk of prisons as being instruments of oppression and repression used by capitalist america. There was no talk, for all practical purposes, of these instruments being directed especially toward “national minorities” and used to prevent/destroy the escalating struggle of these “minorities.” In short, there was nothing approaching a “prison movement” in our meaning of the term.

By the years 1967, 1968, 1969, and as a more direct result of the “civil rights movement,” a greater, more significant number of prisoners had been and were becoming politicized. It was also by 1967 that the transformation from “civil rights” to national liberation was becoming evident/distinct.

Between 1954 and 1967 many things had occurred, many things arose and faded, but exerted an influence. This influence was both external and internal — the student sit-ins and Freedom Rides; Emmett Till and Mack Parker; Little Rock; formation of SNCC in 1960 and its move from “civil rights” to “black power”; the rise and influence of the Nation of Islam; the formation of the Revolutionary Action Movement; formation of the Black Panther Party; the influence of people such as Malik, Eldridge, Robert Williams, Stokeley, Rap; there was the Bandung Conference in 1955; the independence of Ghana in 1957; the struggle and assassination of Lumumba in 1960/61; the struggles in Algeria, Cuba, etc., etc.

All of this began to show itself in a distinctive change in the character of prisoners and their struggles. As a result, there began to be seen prisoners leaving prisons in these years who became involved in the struggle on the street, but who also began to set up organizations of ex-prisoners to support prison struggles. We think 1970 the most proper date to be given to mark that point at which a distinct stage in “prison struggles” manifested itself, giving birth to the “prison movement.”

The above facts, together with: the murders of W.L. Nolen, Cleveland Edwards and Alvin Miller on January 13, 1970; the execution of justice in the form of a pig thrown off a gallery on January 16, 1970; George Jackson, Fleeta Drumgo and John Clutchette being charged for this on February 28, 1970. Only by chance was one of these Brothers able to get a message out to his mother, who went to the B.P.P. It was due to the nature, the character, of the defense activities for the Soledad Brothers, which brought together all the features and influences we’ve mentioned above, and acted to give life to the “prison movement.”

By their nature, the defense activities surrounding the Soledad Brothers served to reach out across the country and form a heretofore non-existing, concrete, conscious bond between prisoners. It was at this point that more — significantly more — prisoners and people outside began to form more organizations, inside and out. Definite, conscious, organized activity, on a mass, national scale, began to take place around prisons.

When people learned of the Soledad Brothers, they consequently learned not only of the contradictions in prisons, or in the “system of justice”; they also learned of the particular role that prisoners and ex-prisoners were and could play in the overall struggle — not as simple “prisoners” but as revolutionaries.

The activities surrounding the Soledad Brothers sparked a series of events which further served to cement this new stage: the Marin County Courthouse, August 7, 1970; George’s assassination; the San Quentin Six; the trial of Ruchell Magee — and Attica, September, 1971.

Many subsequent prison struggles (especially the *nature* of these) — defense and support activity around activists arrested and on trial; the attention that was subsequently given to these; the spread of the concepts of “political prisoners” and “prisoners of war” — we were able to become aware of these and view them with a particular perspective largely because of the process that the Soledad Brothers activity had set in motion.

Also, by this time (1970), that “civil rights movement” which had now become to us a more genuine movement toward national liberation was under heavy attack from the enemy. The number of prisoners of war had increased due to arrest, frame-up and railroading. Armed actions were being carried out. There were underground formations. The number of political (politicized) prisoners had increased — there were more prisoners who had by now possessed a “revolutionary mentality.” What began in 1970 was that the emphasis of prison struggles saw a change. The interests and objectives of prisoners changed. Prison struggles ceased to be characterized as struggles for mere reform and became — consciously — part of the total revolutionary process.

## II

### Statement

The relationship existing between the “prison movement” and the overall struggle in america, the relationship existing between prisons and people outside the walls, has been and will continue to be a dialectical relationship. This relationship has had several rather distinct phases or levels. What has heretofore characterized each of these phases or levels is the “control” and “direction” of outside people — even during those phases/levels when the influence was flowing *from* the prisons to the outside.

We’re approaching (have approached) another level, where the influence again flows from the inside to the outside — only difference being that prisoners will be more involved in direction and control. This present phase/level will best be characterized by the impetus that prisoners will give to the formation of a national prisoners movement, a national revolutionary party, and a national revolutionary front.

### Response

In regards to the part where you state that a level is being approached where “direction” will be flowing from the inside/out, this can **only apply** to the prison struggle, and then that too is minimal. Prisoners have a definite role within the context of the overall struggle and within the context of the struggle that is being waged inside the walls.

However, it must be accepted that prisoners themselves cannot direct or control the struggle. They can *influence* greatly and can be very supportive. They can point out the many contradictions within the prison system, justice department, etc., which can be tied into the overall political/economic system as a whole by Comrades who are working in the communities. Real direction and control can only come from those who are in contact with the People on a day-to-day basis since we all know that it is the People who are the makers of history.

## Reply to the Response

We think your response is evidence of: a misunderstanding of the statement; a misunderstanding or deliberate avoidance of the dialectic of the “prison movement”; a misunderstanding of the process and significance of contradiction in general, and of the particular contradictions involved in the “prison movement.” Other things may be involved, but we’ll begin with these three.

To aid us in our effort to make our position clear, we’ll rely on Mao’s *On Contradiction*, and suggest that the entire piece be *studied*.

Mao points out that the “law of contradiction in things, that is, the law of the unity of opposites, is the basic law of materialist dialectics,” and that the “dialectical world outlook teaches us primarily how to observe and analyze the movement of opposites in different things and, on the basis of such analysis, to indicate the methods for resolving contradictions.”

He begins by describing the universality of contradiction, although he notes that “the particularity of contradiction is still not clearly understood by many comrades, and especially by the dogmatists. They do not understand that it is precisely in the particularity of contradiction that the universality of contradiction resides...The universality or absoluteness of contradiction has a two-fold meaning. One is that contradiction exists in the process of development of all things, and the other is that in the process of development of each thing a movement of opposites exists from beginning to end.” He further points out that these opposites in movement, or, these “two aspects” are at once in conflict and interdependence, and constitute the totality of a thing.

He further notes that each contradiction has its particularity, and that it is especially important “to observe what is particular to this form of motion of matter, namely, to observe the qualitative difference between this form of motion and other forms,” because this constitutes the foundation of our knowledge of a thing.

Not only must we study the particular contradiction of every system, of the forms of motion of matter, but also must study the particular contradiction of each process in the system’s course of development.

But,

In order to reveal the particularity of the contradiction...it is necessary to reveal the particularity of the two aspects of each of the contradictions in that process; otherwise it will be impossible to discover the essence of the process...The two aspects of each contradiction cannot be treated in the same way since each aspect has its own characteristics...

When we speak of understanding each aspect of a contradiction, we mean understanding what specific position each aspect occupies, what concrete forms it assumes in its interdependence and in its contradiction with its opposite, and what concrete methods are employed in the struggle with its opposite, when the two are both interdependent and in contradiction, and also after the interdependence breaks down...

...each stage in the process has its particular features to which we must give attention too... in a lengthy process the conditions usually differ at each stage. The reason is that, although the nature of the fundamental contradiction in the process of development of a thing and the essence of the process remain unchanged, the fundamental contradiction becomes more and more intensified as it passes from one stage to another in the lengthy process. In addition, among the numerous major and minor contradictions which are determined or influenced by the fundamental contradiction, some become intensified, some are temporarily or partially resolved

or mitigated, and some new ones emerge; hence the process is marked by stages. If people do not pay attention to the stages in the process of development of a thing, they cannot deal with its contradictions properly.

Further on, Mao deals with the principal contradiction and the principal aspect of a contradiction.

The principal contradiction is that “whose existence and development determine or influence the existence and development of the other contradictions.” Also, as to the principal aspect:

...in any given contradiction, whether principal or secondary...the development of the contradictory aspects is uneven. Sometimes they seem to be in equilibrium, which is however only temporary and relative, while unevenness is basic. Of the two contradictory aspects, one must be principal and the other secondary. The principal aspect is the one playing the leading role in the contradiction. The nature of a thing is determined mainly by the principal aspect of a contradiction, the aspect which has gained the dominant position.

But this situation is not static; the principal and the non-principal aspects of a contradiction transform themselves into each other and the nature of the thing changes accordingly. In a given process or at a given stage in the development of a contradiction, “A” is the principal aspect and “B” is the non-principal aspect; at another stage or in another process the roles are reversed — a change determined by the extent of the increase or decrease in the force of each aspect in its struggle against the other in the course of the development of a thing...When the principal aspect which has gained predominance changes, the nature of a thing changes accordingly.

Some people think that this is not true of certain contradictions...and there is no change in their respective positions. This is the mechanical materialist conception, not the dialectical materialist conception. True, the productive forces, practice and the economic base generally play the principal and decisive role... But it must also be admitted that in certain conditions, such aspects as the relations of production, theory and the superstructure in turn manifest themselves in the principal and decisive role. The creation and advocacy of revolutionary theory plays the principal and decisive role in those times of which Lenin said, “Without revolutionary theory there can be no revolutionary movement.” When a task, no matter which, has to be performed, but there is as yet no guiding line, method, plan or policy, the principal and decisive thing is to decide on a guiding line, method, plan or policy.

We don't think it's necessary to go into Identity, Struggle and Antagonism.

The “prison movement” represents one of the many contradictions in America. But the movement also has its own contradictions, its own principal and secondary contradictions; each of these contradictions has its own opposing aspects, one aspect within each contradiction being primary, the other aspect within each being secondary. Each of the problems Mao dealt with in his study of the law of contradiction (the universality, particularity, principal contradiction and principal aspect, etc.) are found in the “prison movement.”

Since contradiction is inherent in the “prison movement,” any/all of the many contradictions within the “prison movement” maintain their separate aspects and the power of self-movement. It is this self-movement which accounts for the ability of these aspects to reverse their positions.

Consequently, if we have a contradiction within the “prison movement” represented by the “inside” and the “outside,” it stands that one of these aspects will be the principal one, and the other the non-principal one.

“But this situation is not static...” In a given process or at a given stage in the development of a contradiction, the roles are reversed. This reversal is “determined by the extent of the increase or decrease in the force of each aspect in its struggle against the other... When the principal aspect which has gained predominance changes, the nature of a thing changes accordingly.”

In other words, if outside forces represented the principal aspect and exercised real direction and control,

their position is not static. Given certain conditions, at a given stage in the development of the contradiction, they become the non-principal aspect. The reversal is determined by, say, an increase in the force of prisoners and a decrease in the force of those outside the walls. Once the inside forces become the principal aspect, the nature of the contradiction, the nature of the “prison movement” changes accordingly.

We have asserted that the “prison movement” is qualitatively different from the “movement/struggle in prisons since the 1800’s.” But what is of equal significance is the changes which have taken place within the “prison movement” itself.

Just as “movement/struggle in prisons since the 1800’s” represent qualitative changes which contributed to the qualitative change that we call the “prison movement,” in the same way, quantitative changes occurring within the “prison movement” are bringing about new contradictions, new levels, new stages, changes in the nature of the “prison movement” and of the contradictions within it. The “prison movement” began to do more than simply point up contradictions in prison/the “system of justice”; it began to do more than point up the economic basis of “crime.” It began to do more than point up the contradictions in “capitalist” society and the role of prisons in such societies.

As the contradictions between america and its oppressed nations sharpened, these contradictions became central to the initial formation and development of the “prison movement.” Beyond merely pointing up contradictions inherent in “social production and private appropriation” and beyond showing prisons as “instruments of control and intimidation for those who challenge this system” — beyond all this, the “prison movement” began to point up and aggressively involve itself in all aspects of the contradiction between america and the developing revolutionary national liberation struggles within it.

Not only was the “prison movement” influenced by this “external” development (national liberation struggle/consciousness) but it was a part of it, and it exerted its own influence upon the developing national liberation struggles. Prisoners and struggles in prisons contributed to the formulation and dissemination of a consciousness and a theory of national oppression and consequently became a part of the struggle to end this oppression.

What we mean to say is that as the “prison movement” developed, the “inside” did not remain static, did not remain the non-principal aspect in its struggle with its opposite (the outside). To deny the possibility of this is to abandon dialectical materialism; to deny its actuality is to evidence dogmatism, chauvinism, opportunism, or a combination of all three. Further, it’s to evidence the “increase and decrease in the force of each aspect” — namely, the decrease in the ability of the outside to, at this stage, remove the obstruction blocking the further development of the contradictions, thereby pointing up what has made — at this stage — the reversal of the role of these aspects possible and necessary. It further points up the nature of the present contradiction, i.e., the function or role of the present principal aspect (inside) at this stage, i.e., the creation and advocacy of revolutionary theory, which will lead to revolutionary practice.

If the universe is an interrelated changing process, we recognize it in parts by separating out, in thought, certain partial processes — aspects such, for example, as society, the means of production, changing objects, words. These we call Isolates. An isolate is something that has been dragged from its environment in space, time, and matter. By itself, therefore, it is a fiction, for dialectically nothing can be free of environment; but it is a *real* fiction in the sense that it really does have an objective existence. The first step in the study of the dialectic is to chip out its isolates, to study them, and then to remake the dialectic by seeing them again in their environment. — H. Levy, *Aspects of Dialectical Materialism*, quoted in *Lectures on Marxist Philosophy* by David Guest

This is what happens in all analysis, evidenced, for instance, in studying the law of contradiction. It was quoted so as to serve as a point of departure.

To say that a thing has contradiction is to say that it has a dialectic, and vice versa. It was with this understanding that we stated, “The relationship existing between the ‘prison movement’ and the overall struggle in america, the relationship existing between prisoners and people outside the walls, has been and will continue to be a dialectical relationship. This relationship has had several rather distinct phases or levels. What has heretofore characterized each of these phases or levels is the ‘control’ and ‘direction’ of outside people — even during those phases/levels when the influence was flowing from the prisons to the outside.”

Enough of what's been said up to this point should serve to bring understanding of the meaning of the above paragraph. For example, the "civil rights movement" during one phase/level exerted influence upon prisoners; this "external" influence was felt, came to be utilized by prisoners together with internal dialectic, resulting in the exertion of an influence flowing from prisons to the outside (i.e., exposure of prison conditions). With such things as support/defense activities, formation of outside groups, awareness of activities in other prisons, the flow of literature into prisons, etc., more prisoners became politicized, there was more organized, conscious resistance, prisoners began to come together into study groups, collectives; chapters of the Nation of Islam and the B.P.P. were formed in prisons. Some of the most advanced ideological thought and programmatic proposals have issued from inside prisons.

But, to one extent or another, prisoners have never been able to sufficiently determine the direction of their influence, their contributions. It has been left with the outside element to determine what was of value, how it would be used, how far certain ideas or certain practical steps would be taken. There were instances where outside forces not only lacked the willingness to adopt and effect certain elements of thought, certain programs; but there has also been a tendency, a failure to grasp the significance and necessity of certain positions and programs.

To this must be added a certain decrease in the ranks of revolutionaries on the outside, a decrease measured not only in the *numbers* of active people, but measured also by the decrease in the number of "active" people who are still struggling to bring about *revolutionary* change and not mere reform. Many "active" people have found for themselves comfortable positions, many times gaining these comfortable positions at the expense of prisoners. Many folks have become so concerned with the "survival" of themselves and the groups to which they belong, that their vision has been hampered, their growth has been retarded. Because of the "needs of (economic) survival," the benefits and comforts and distractions of life on the street, many circumstances abound which create confusion, hinder movement towards goals which break the routine and cause people to be placed in the path of the enemy in ways which jeopardize "freedom" and health.

In "Toward the United Front," Comrade-Brother George Jackson noted "the new unitarian and progressive current" which had sprung up around political prisoners and asked how this could be developed and employed in the overall struggle.

The "Prison Movement," the August 7th movement and all similar efforts educate the people in the illegitimacy of establishment power and hint at the ultimate goal of revolutionary consciousness at every level of struggle. The goal is always the same: the creation of an infrastructure capable of fielding a people's army.

With this as a common major goal, it would seem that anti-establishment forces would find little difficulty in developing common initiatives and methods consistent with the goals of mass society. Regretfully, this has not been the case. Only the prison movement has shown any promise of cutting across the ideological, racial and cultural barricades that have blocked the natural coalition of left-wing forces at all times in the past. So this movement must be used to provide an example. The issues involved and the dialectic which flows from an understanding of the clear objective existence of overt oppression could be the springboard for our entry into the tide of increasing world-wide socialist consciousness.

George was pointing here to a need, a necessity, brought about by the overall conditions of struggle. He was pointing to "barricades" blocking not simply the advancement of "prison struggles," but which prevented the advancement of the overall struggle in America. For a number of reasons, outside forces were not able to engage themselves in various types of actions necessary for the further development of the struggle; George rightly believed that the "prison movement" could provide an example, provide the impetus for such development. He was not calling for the "prison movement" to merely "point up contradictions in prison"; not merely calling for it to "point up contradictions in the 'system of justice.'"

He was calling upon the "prison movement" to "begin to break the old behavioral patterns that have repeatedly allowed bourgeois capitalism, its imperialism and fascism, to triumph over the last several decades." Further, and most important, he was calling upon the "prison movement" to play a specific role in the "creation of an infra-

structure capable of fielding a people's army," and asking that this be done under "disciplined and principled leadership... 'One simply cannot act without a head.'"

But where was this "head" to be found, if not in the "prison movement" itself? Subsequent developments have shown that, if this "head" is to be found within the "prison movement," then it will, further, be found in the prisons, among/represented by prisoners, rather than those outside the walls — at this particular stage.

We understand, for instance, that those behind the walls have limited mobility, that they don't have "day-to-day" contact with the people. But it's not this daily contact with the people alone that's needed, at this stage. Those "anti-establishment forces" George spoke of had/have this daily contact — but the barricades remain!!!! What's needed are "particular responses from the nervous systems" of those having this contact; what's needed is/are particular forms of practice, guided by particular theory.

Our understanding of the reasons underlying the call for the national prisoners movement, the proposed party and liberation front, indicate that these are specific proposals, made by specific people, aiming toward a specific objective. It stands that these can't be simply thrown out in the *hope* that someone will grab them, begin to make them realities, and do this in specific ways — ways which would give some assurance that these proposals would fulfill their purpose.

Atiba  
Fakih