



# **Q** **UEER FIRE**

**THE GEORGE JACKSON BRIGADE**  
**MEN AGAINST SEXISM AND**  
**GAY STRUGGLE AGAINST PRISON**

**Front Cover:** Men Against Sexism members Ed Mead and Danny Atteberry walk the tier of Big Red, the Intensive Security Unit at Walla Walla State Penitentiary.  
**Back Cover:** Big Red in the aftermath of struggle.

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# INTRODUCTION



It may seem strange for anarchists who approach struggle from an insurrectional direction to be compiling writings by and about The George Jackson Brigade. If we understand that power is diffuse, that guerrilla warfare is a strategy of desperation and a dead-end, and that our goal is the generalization of uncontrollability, then the urban guerrillas of the 1970s appear somewhat distant, somewhat foreign. Sometimes admirable in their context. Sometimes horrifying and authoritarian to their core. It seems, with most anarchists, there are two dominant ways of viewing these groups: uncritical valorization and outright condemnation. Both of these attitudes reek of ideological thought, and both stifle the intelligence and creativity of revolt.

To make martyrs out of the urban guerrillas is to be filled with the spirit of Christianity. Rather than understand the complexities of groups like The Weather Underground, The Red Army Faction, The Red Brigades, etc, the fetishist only sees the explosion, the shell casing, the youthful lips spitting fire at the bourgeoisie; in short: struggle as spectacle. By this logic, extremity, economic damage, and militant language trump strategy or the ability of the act to generalize. It does not matter that many of these groups were authoritarian in their organization, practices, and goals: the smoke and fire obscure the state-form lying in wait.

It is also easy to romanticize these revolutionary figures, separated as we are by time. It is tempting, when revolt has taken a turn toward diffuse informality, to look to these past groups as more coherent expressions of attack. Revolt now - whether it is due to our strategy or our cowardice - generally takes more subtle forms in the US. When we constantly come up against the problem of how exactly we are to *spread* revolt, the fury of dynamite can seem appealing (and, let us not forget, sometimes that fury is the best way to spread revolt). But these groups, in their specialism, could not dynamite the separation between themselves and others. If we look at where so many of these “heroes” of the guerrilla struggle ended up - college professors, professionals, windbags who condemn any act of property destruction - our romantic feelings take on a sick pallor.

These points - the critique of specialization, the condemnation of authoritarian structure, the refusal of martyrdom - should not be confused with the pretentious scoffing of the ideologue. Insurrectionary anarchists, despite their retreat from fixed ideology, sometimes harbor their own moralities. In the minds of many insurrectionists, the guerrilla, rather than being a hero, is a fool. No matter their goals, their ways of organizing, the content of their writings. One need only look at the hatred spewed by some anarchists for the diffuse guerrillas of the FAI or CCF. In their self-righteousness, these anarchists have replaced critique of the guerrilla form - a valid and necessary critique - with a flattening of reality, a dualism of insurrectionist and guerrilla that, in its bitterness, cannot see its stupidity.

If we avoid the traps set by both the fetishists and the opponents of guerrilla struggle, and if we study the histories of those struggles, we may equip ourselves with more tools - both material and analytical - for our own, insurrectional, break with the existent.



While certainly the new diffuse anarchist guerrilla differs from groups such as the RAF or Weather Underground, one does find certain similarities with it and the ELF, Canada's Direct Action, UK's Angry Brigade, and, to some extent, The George Jackson Brigade. The anarchist elements in these latter groups were simply not present in the vanguardism, Marxist-Leninist politics, and authoritarian organizational forms of the former.

The George Jackson Brigade is an interesting case, as it contains a sort of dual spirit. The group was made up of both Marxist-Leninist and anarchist members. The Brigade's major political statement - *The Power of the People is the Force of Life* - even contains a written dialogue between the two groupings, exploring their disagreements on revolutionary strategy.

The Brigade's diversity extended beyond the political as well. The group consisted of black and white members; gay, straight, and bisexual members; college graduates and ex-cons. Where groups such as the Weather Underground were, by and large, coming from the upper-middle class, Brigade members' experiences gave the group a more nuanced view of struggle. The struggle against prison was, from the beginning, central to the Brigade's activities, influenced, in no small part, by the fact that members of the Brigade had been in and out of prison their entire lives. The Brigade's diversity, I would postulate, also contributed to its differences in tone and content from other US guerrilla groups of the time. The ability to self-reflect (as happened after the Brigade's botched bombing of a Safeway store) can often take a back seat to the revolutionary chest-thumping that one reads about in memoirs and histories of groups like the Weather Underground.

Gender politics, too, played an integral role in the Brigade's political and

organizational orientation. Feminist analysis of gender roles and affective labor and queer analysis of heterosexuality contributed to the group's commitment to gay and women's liberation. While this may seem a minor point to anarchists today, one must look at its context to understand its importance. The other guerrilla groups of the time pushed troubling political lines around gender: Andreas Baader's poisonous misogyny, Mark Rudd's flagrant sexism, the Weather Underground's use of "sexual liberation" to both pressure both women and gay men into heterosexual sex...the examples are endless.

So, though one may critique the Brigade's strategic or organization choices, to outright condemn them would mean losing a valuable historical reference point in our own struggle against this world. In the Brigade, we find an open dialogue about revolutionary strategy, an ethic of active and antagonistic women's and gay revolt, and a deep commitment to warfare against prison.

History cannot be abandoned to the cannibalistic "radicals" of the universities, who see past revolt as a career opportunity. As with all things, history can be a whetstone with which we sharpen our daggers for our present war against the civilized order. I hope this publication can contribute in some way to revolt against prison society, and to queer antagonist struggle. The weapons are everywhere; the secret, as always, is to really begin.

# A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE GEORGE JACKSON BRIGADE



The George Jackson Brigade (GJB) was an urban guerrilla group that operated in Seattle from 1975 to 1978. The group was named after George Jackson, an imprisoned Black Panther who had been killed at San Quentin Prison, California, in 1971. The Brigade was composed of unemployed ex-convicts, ex-students, and working class communists and anarchists. Over half of the members were women and half of the women in the group were lesbians. The group had no leader and all decisions were made together.

The group's first actions in the spring 1975 centered around a labor struggle in Seattle. A local contractor had refused to hire black people, triggering a popular campaign against the contractor. There were many pickets and blockades of the contractor's work-sites during which many people were arrested.

The media also extensively covered this popular struggle.

Finding it opportune to intervene in the struggle, the Brigade placed a bomb at the contractor's headquarters in the middle of the night, harming no one while completely destroying the building. They also circulated a leaflet in the crowds of demonstrators that criticized the struggle for making it center around race rather than general unemployment. Later, the Brigade sabotaged construction equipment, burned a truck, and damaged a CAT that belonged to the same racist contractor. Due to the bombing, the contractor refused to testify against the protestors who had been arrested during the pickets. The Brigade did not claim these actions, not wanting to detract from the struggle or have their actions be labeled terrorism.

In June, Brigade members bombed the Department of Corrections building in Olympia, expressing their solidarity with all of the prisoners in Walla Walla State Prison. This was the first time that the Brigade claimed an action by issuing a communiqué to the media and the public. In August, they then bombed the FBI office in Tacoma and the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) in Everett on the same day. This was done in retaliation for the suppression of the American Indian Movement by the FBI and BIA. These bombings went unclaimed.

By the end of the summer, after three successful actions, Brigade members



were joyous and hopeful. All of their actions had been carefully planned and executed, harming no one and resonating with the public. With the Brigade, Seattle had joined the armed international struggle against capitalism. It seemed as if the summer of 1975 was to mark the beginning of a new offensive.

But life is chaotic, filled with traps, and always eager to test the bold. One evening in September, a young man not affiliated with the Brigade attempted to arm a bomb at the Capitol Hill Safeway. At the time, Safeway was far more corrupt and exploitative of immigrant farm workers than it is today and had become a target for protests, pickets, and arson across the US. That night, the young man blew himself up while arming the bomb. Hearing the news of his death, the Brigade immediately planned their revenge. Unlike their previous actions, their plans were rushed. A timed bomb was placed in a bag of dog food at the Capitol Hill Safeway, and members quickly telephoned in to the police and told them to evacuate the store. Hoping to make the GJB out to be monsters, the police did not call Safeway and have them evacuate the store. The bomb went off, causing minor injuries to several customers.

This disaster plagued the hearts of the Brigade members. The rest of the fall and winter of 1975 was spent locked in self-criticism. What was meant to reflect the general distrust and anger felt by the neighborhood towards the Safeway had instead harmed poor people from the same neighborhood. Their hasty planning was one factor that caused these injuries. It would not be until New Year's Day of 1976 that the Brigade would act again.

In attempting the practice self-criticism with their actions, they bombed the Safeway regional headquarters in Bellevue, harming no one. On the same night, the Brigade bombed a City Light substation that supplied power to the wealthy Laurelhurst neighborhood, completely destroying it. At the time, City Light workers were on strike against the company, and they staged a picket around the ruins, fighting off the scab workers who City Light had paid to repair it. After the failure of the Capitol Hill bombing, the Brigade found its actions supported and appreciated by working class people. The group had struck two exploiters in one night and the reasons why could not be any clearer.

Unfortunately, one of the Brigade members was to be murdered by the police three weeks later during a bank robbery in Tukwila. Two others members of the group were captured during the robbery, while the rest of the Brigade had to shoot their way out of the ambush. In March, while one of the prisoners was being taken to a doctor's appointment, the group attacked his police guards and freed him. In the process, a guard was shot and wounded. After the prisoner liberation, the group retreated into rural Oregon to regroup after their defeat. It would not be until 1977 that the group would rise again. But that is a different story.

On March 10, 1976, members of the George Jackson Brigade liberated their comrade John Sherman from police custody. Sherman had been arrested along

with Ed Mead during a bank robbery in Tukwila several weeks earlier. The police had attacked the Brigade as they left the bank, shooting John Sherman in the jaw and ultimately killing Bruce Siedel. As the police put their captured comrades in the police cars, the Brigade continued to fire on the police until finally making their escape.

The Brigade had nearly made off with 43,000 dollars, money that was desperately needed in order to continue to operate clandestinely. At that time, bank robberies were a common method used by guerrilla groups internationally to fund their activities.

John Sherman was being taken from the King County Jail to Harbourview Medical Center for a doctor's appointment when he was liberated by the Brigade. During the liberation, the Brigade shot the cop guarding Sherman and escaped. To claim this action, the Brigade mailed a bullet from the same gun used at the bank robbery to the Seattle Post-Intelligencer on International Women's Day. They also sent the wiring from John Sherman's wounded mouth to a local radio station. After this, the Brigade disappeared into rural Oregon, taking time to heal, mourn, and critically analyze their actions.

The Brigade had just lost two of its members. Ed Mead was in Walla Walla State Prison and Bruce Siedel was dead. Both of these men had been lovers of other Brigade members and had lived intensely and intimately with them for months. The wound that was in all of their hearts was deep as they settled into a slow, banal existence in the towns of rural Oregon. Many people in these towns helped them, some knowingly, others unknowingly. Liberating their friend had drained all of their meager resources and the Brigade was forced to learn a new level of self-reliance.

While they were in hiding, a Grand Jury was convened and many leftists and militants in Seattle were called in to testify about what they knew of the George Jackson Brigade. While still in hiding, the group mailed a handwriting sample to the media in order to clear the name of a woman whom the authorities said had signed one of the Brigades communiqués. Some leftists cooperated with the Grand Jury, others refused and were jailed, and the entire Seattle left was put under intense repression for months.

In the midst of the repression, the FBI framed and imprisoned an anti-prison activist by paying a junky to say that the activist had participated in Brigade action. The FBI later gave the junky a new identity. During this time period, Ed Mead was sentenced to multiple life sentences for his involvement with the Brigade. Despite the repression, the Grand Jury was eventually defeated, having come up with nothing and being legally required to dissolve.

Knowing that they had to continue taking action, Brigade members began to assemble tools and equipment. Soon they launched a new robbery campaign to raise funds for their next offensive. After coming up with 25,000 dollars, while

also using false checks to purchase food and other necessities, the group left rural Oregon and returned to the Seattle area. Once there, they settled into a clandestine routine and began to plan for their next attack against the global capitalist system.

On May 12, 1977, the Brigade placed two bombs in two Rainier National Bank branches in Bellevue. This action was done to support the prison strike that had recently taken place inside Walla Walla State Prison.

The strike had arisen in response to the lengthy sentences in isolation holes and the psychiatric behavior modification programs that were in practice at the prison. At the time, it was the longest prison strike in Washington State.

When the strike had ended, there had been assurances from the Department of Corrections that the barbaric practices at the prison would stop. Over time, many people saw that the assurances had been empty, with very little changing in the prison. The Brigade bombed the Bellevue bank branches because of the bank's financial ties to the Seattle Times newspaper. The paper had been printing articles that condemned and demonized the prisoner strike.

This is how the second offensive of the George Jackson Brigade began in the summer of 1977. With the memories of their fallen and captured comrades still in their hearts, the group pressed on in their efforts.

After their bombing of two Rainier National Bank branches, the next action of the Brigade was to acquire more money. Obviously, living a clandestine life did not permit them to earn money slowly, and large sums were necessary to rent houses, build bombs, drive cars, and buy food. On May 21st, 1977, the Brigade robbed the Newport Hills state liquor store near Bellevue. During the robbery, the Brigade was forced to take the manager's wallet because it was in the same bag as the 1,300 dollars they had stolen. The next day, the Brigade mailed the wallet back to the manager with all of her personal money (about 45 dollars) still inside.

On June 20th, 1977, the brigade robbed a Rainier National Bank near Bellevue, continuing in their pattern of stealing from where the richest people lived. They fled the bank with 4,200 dollars. In a communiqué issued after the robbery, the Brigade took credit for their actions and reminded the reader that Rainier National Bank was specifically targeted because of its financial ties to the Seattle Times. The paper had been printing misinformation about the prison struggle taking place at the Walla Walla State Penitentiary, the place where Brigade member Ed Mead was locked up. In the same communiqué, the Brigade told the reader that all of the money would be used to carry out further actions. True to their statement, the Brigade acted in less than two weeks.

Unfortunately, chaos got the best of the Brigade during the action. On July 3rd, the night before the nationalist orgy of Independence Day, the Brigade drove down to Olympia where they placed a triple pipe bomb near an electrical transformer adjacent to the Capitol Building. They called in a warning, instructing the authorities to clear the area in half an hour. When half an hour passed and there

had been no explosion, the police searched for the bomb, found it, and eventually diffused it. In a communiqué explaining the intention of the planned attack, the Brigade said their bombing attempt had been for the prisoners in Walla Walla who were still being thrown into long periods of isolation. By August of that summer, the warden had been replaced and the prisoners taken out of solitary confinement.

Fall was approaching when Rita Brown, dressed as a man, walked into an Old National Bank, handed the teller a note indicating she had a gun, and walked out with 1,100 dollars. Eleven days later, on September 19th, again dressed in drag, she handed a note to a teller at a People's National Bank on 76th Avenue. The note read simply: THIS IS A HOLD UP. I HAVE A GUN. THE GEORGE JACKSON BRIGADE. She walked out of the bank with 8,200 dollars, more money than the Brigade had ever stolen. With nearly 10,000 dollars, the Brigade planned its next campaign.

Machinists from various auto workers unions were on strike and picketing car dealerships. Brigade members joined the picket lines, had conversations, and decided that the rank and file unionists wouldn't disapprove of an attack on the dealerships. Their first bomb didn't go off, but on October 12th, they successfully detonated a bomb at the S.L. Savidge car dealership. The Brigade made sure to clearly state in a communiqué that they were in no way connected with the unions and were acting independently. Three days later, the group bombed two vehicles at a Dodge dealership. Three days after this, over 80 cars at a Ford Dealership had their tires slashed by anonymous individuals, causing over 5,000 dollars in damages. The Brigade was not responsible for this last action, so it is clear that the Brigade was correct in assuming that rank and file unionists supported clandestine sabotage.

Meanwhile, in Germany, another urban guerrilla group called the Red Army Faction (RAF) caused an international scandal. In April of 1977, three members of the RAF were found guilty of murder and imprisoned. That September, elements of the RAF kidnapped Hanns Martin Schleyer, the president of the Employers' Association of the Federal Republic. Schleyer had been a member of the Nazi Party and the SS during WWII. As a respected businessman in post-war West Germany, Schleyer represented the hypocrisy, blindness, and unbroken fascism of German democracy. The RAF stated that they would not release Schleyer unless their comrades were freed from prison.

The German government did not respond to these demands, and so on October 16th, a commando of Palestinian comrades hijacked a Lufthansa plane, saying they would only release their hostages in exchange for the RAF prisoners. The plane eventually landed in Somalia to refuel where it was raided by German Special Forces. Three of the hijackers were killed and all of the hostages were freed. The next morning, the RAF prisoners were found dead their cells. The authorities claimed that they had killed themselves, but it was commonly understood that the prisoners had been executed. Seeking revenge, the RAF drove Hanns Martin

Schleyer into the woods, shot him in the head, and told the media where they could find the dead Nazi.

To express their international solidarity with the RAF, the Brigade bombed a Phil Smart Mercedes Benz dealership in Bellevue on November 1st. The dealership was chosen because Schleyer was formerly president of Daimler Benz, the manufacturer of Mercedes Benz cars. Two days after this action, the Brigade released its 40 page political statement, *The Power of the People Is the Force of Life*, a text that details all of their exploits in their own words. Inspired by the actions of the RAF, the Brigade's next plan was to kidnap the director of the Department of Social and Health Services, the person who oversaw all Washington prisons. Their plans were underway when the unthinkable happened. Rita Brown was captured, the group fled Seattle, and fear began to dominate the group's minds.

Those who truly rebel, who fight with all their hearts, always risk the most. They risk their lives, their loves, their liberty. And so it was that the small group of rebels was reduced down to three.

Janine Bertram, John Sherman, and Therese Coupez listened to a police scanner as the authorities captured their comrade Rita Brown on November 4th, 1977. They immediately fled their safe house in North Seattle and found their way to a new house on a hill overlooking Tacoma. In a communiqué issued after their comrade's capture, the Brigade wrote, "We learn a thousand times more from defeat than we do from a victory. This is true, but only to the extent that we make it true in our practice. And we will make it true because we love you, and we love freedom, and because we are part of the masses of people and a handful of sleazy capitalists and their lackeys are not a match for us. So take care of yourself and hold on. Victory is certain."

Rita's lover, Janine, was devastated by the capture. In their new safe house, Janine wrote to her lost love in her diary. John and Therese, a straight couple, offered her little emotional support. "When I say I want you, I'm told I'm sniveling. Fuck, don't need that support," she wrote. The group tried to keep itself disciplined but instead began to devour itself. After a bank robbery, John mysteriously lost a large sum of their stolen funds. "Wonder which of them it is that disposed of \$150." John had a gambling problem and constantly lied about what he did with the group's money.

After their robbery, the group did little but read, go to the movies, and abuse drugs to mask the pain of their loss. "It is hard to keep a clear view of the necessity of this work when I am completely isolated. Snivel...not a friend in the world," Janine wrote. Eventually the money dried up, some of it spent on rent and food, some of it squandered on gambling and drugs. The group decided to rob another bank on December 8th, 1977. "Am scared shitless. I don't think I'll lose my shit," Janine wrote before the robbery. Luckily, the group was able to get away with \$3,966 from a Tacoma bank. A few days later, some trusted comrades came from

Seattle with gifts, comfort, and encouragement from the above-ground movement.

John continued to gamble money, coming back to the safehouse one night missing \$800 dollars. Janine and Therese confronted him, but Janine was passive and could only listen as Therese and John yelled at each other. When Janine began to express criticism of John to Therese, she angrily defended her male lover. This only increased Janine's isolation, but luckily a group of women from Seattle came to visit her. "Many women are sending you white light," she wrote in her diary to Rita. Indeed, the women's community in Seattle was supporting Rita. In addition to this, the visiting women helped Janine attempt to learn meditation techniques that would allow her to contact Rita psychically. In her diary, Janine described her psychic connections growing more powerful.

On December 23rd, the group planted a bomb at a Puget Sound Power & Light substation in Tukwila. They called in a warning and twenty minutes later the bomb exploded, harming no one. In their communiqué, the group said the action was intended to "protest the criminal and inhuman conditions at the King County Jail." Their captured comrade Mark Cook had been kept in isolation at the County Jail for twenty one months and the communiqué encouraged everyone to do what they could to end this type of treatment.

The next day, a woman called KOMO TV and told the operator that a bomb would go off at a truck company in fifteen minutes. The bomb exploded, destroying one car. In a communiqué issued after the bombing, the Brigade said the action was in solidarity with auto workers who were still on strike. The local machinists' union representative disowned the attacks, but the Brigade maintained its faith in the rank and file workers.

John continued to waste away money and the two women forbid him from going out. He didn't listen to them, and Janine began to dream of her and Rita beating the crap out of him. With her group falling apart, Janine began to doubt the armed struggle, herself, and her dreams. After a random bank robber began shooting at police during a botched escape, was shot in leg, and yet continued to fire until he was captured, Janine wrote "that takes courage or insanity." On January 10th, the Brigade robbed another bank, making off with \$2,518.

On January 11th, Rita Brown pleaded guilty to her charges. This made Janine sad and confused. "It's good you said yer glad you did it, but people associate guilty with wrong." The group continued to disintegrate, unable even to play a board game without fighting. On January 20th a group of above-ground comrades visited and brought Rita's full statement to the court. It refreshed and rejuvenated Janine to see that her lover was still defiant and strong.

One month later, Rita Brown was sentenced to twenty five years.

After robbing a bank in University Place for \$1,899, the Brigade received a communiqué from a group called the "Coven." This was an above-ground group and in their text they applauded some actions of the Brigade and criticized others.

They encouraged more dialogue between the underground and the above-ground, citing a lack of it in the group's actions. Both aspects of the struggle were necessary, but there needed to be more communication. The Brigade did not answer this communiqué immediately, but eventually invited some comrades to the house to begin to formulate a new strategy. Soon after this, the group was destroyed. Surrounded in their car, parked next to a burger joint, the three were captured by the FBI just as they were to rob a bank on March 21st, 1978. The group was only as strong as much as its members loved and trusted each other. Love broke comrades out of jail and propelled the group down the freeway after a bank robbery. Trust kept the group happy, motivated, and courageous. As soon as the group began to turn on itself, its days were numbered.



# A SHORT AUTOBIOGRAPHY

**BY BO BROWN**



I turned 30 on October 14th and have discovered my first grey hairs in recent weeks. I grew up in Klamath Falls, a redneck Weyerhaeuser town in rural Oregon; my parents fled the poverty of the South a couple of years before I was born. I have one sibling who lives in that same town, raises a family and works for that same mill. My mom was a passive, nagging, battered wife and my dad an uneducated, insecure alcoholic most of my life. They have both made huge changes in their lives in more recent years. I started working outside the home about age 14; my first encounter with the police was age 16 about a stolen car. Luckily, the owner dropped the charges - his daughter (my lover) was also joy riding. As far as I knew we were the only queers in the world and I had never heard of a clitoris. My parents took out a small loan and sent me to a small local business college. They did this because I was good in school and it was all they could do. I transferred to the Salem branch where I graduated with accounting and IBM skills. Almost got kicked out of the dorm for a hot romance with a wonderful womyn; we never made it to bed and she had to stay there so I called them a bunch of liars and squeaked by.

I moved to Seattle in '68 where a lifetime/school/neighborhood male friend lived. He helped me learn the city and eat - no strings attached and certainly no sex. Got a job in a bank balancing the savings department to a computer, that lasted nine months and then I got hired by the Post Office. I discovered the gay bars and went through changes with my bi-sexual lover (the same one from high school) until she finally split, then I became a working class bar butch dyke. I drank a lot, got even tougher and went to work every day for over a year.

Eventually there was another lover; we lived closer to the hippie-dopers and tripped out frequently, I "came out" verbally at the job. There were other queers there and we were pretty strong and took care of one another even though we never organized as such. All through this period I had several more encounters with the police mostly around traffic violations and once for shoplifting. I'd always hear stories in the bars and see bruises on the people who'd been in various police hassles - mostly because they were queer. The police were still kicking in and tearing up



gay bars on a fairly regular basis. In '71 I got busted for stealing from my boss who was still the U.S.P.O. Did 7 months of a one year and one day sentence in Terminal Island Federal Penitentiary, Calif. Learned a whole lot about racism, queer hating, mean police, junkies and other such facts of life; I learned a lot from sisters there, like that self hate, disgust and feelings of helplessness experienced throughout my youth could have easily led me (if I'd been raised in a city where it was readily available) to dope and getting strung out. George Jackson was murdered - shot in the back - and the Attica massacre happened while I was locked up.

Came back to Seattle to find no lover, no home, only a couple of friends and no job. So I went through a couple of government programs and a few lovers and finally learned from another dyke that womyn are not chicks. The first womyn's event I went to was at the U of W - an IWS conference - there was a prison workshop going on, run by some social workers who had all their experience on the outside of the bars. Well I told them they didn't know what they were talking about and I became a public speaker and the token ex-con that very day.

Shortly after this, I was at SCCC where they paid (work study jobs) people to do prison work. After a bullshit trip with an egomaniacal man there, a womyn's prison project was formed with a fine strong sister/lover. I was part of the politico lesbian community. I worked on lots of different projects with children, womyn, men and Third World peoples but prison work was always the most important in my life. In a couple of years, I heard a lot of folks in a lot of places talk about the revolution, but nobody did anything except talk. The BLA and Assata were working their asses off but nobody in Seattle did a thing. Then the SLA stormed over the ruling class's toes and met a fiery death; still nobody did anything. Then the GJB started happening right under our very noses - it made sense to me that you just can't talk Rockefeller et al. into giving up what they have stolen from the people. I knew it was time for me to put my words into action.

# SENTENCING STATEMENT

**BY BO BROWN**



I stand before this mockery of justice court to be condemned as its enemy - and I am its enemy! I am a member of the George Jackson Brigade and I know the answer to Bertolt Brecht's question: "Which is the biggest crime, to rob a bank or to found one?"

It is to my sisters and brothers of the working class that I am accountable - NOT to this court that harasses and searches my peers before they can enter what is supposed to be their courtroom. NOT to this or any court whose hidden purpose is to punish the poor and non-white in the name of the U.S. government. A government which perpetuates the crimes of war and repression has NO right to prescribe punishment for those who resist the continuation of worldwide death and misery. This government didn't ask its citizens what we thought about CIA intervention in Chile or current U.S. big business holdings in South Africa.

I am a native fighting on her homeground! I was born and raised right here. All my life has been spent in Oregon and Washington. My parents are working people. My father a mill worker for 32 years, my mother an unskilled laborer at the county nursing home. We always had to count every penny and do without some thing or another to make it from payday to payday. I have pumped gas, been a clerk, a mechanic, and a printer and a variety of other things. That makes me a common working person as is most of the population of this world. We have nothing to survive by except labor - our sweat. We are slaves! Forced to give our labor and our lives to maintain an economic system designed to serve only the rich - almost always white male corporate owners. This ruling class has no respect for human life. Its only concerns are private property and personal power. They manipulate us as puppets on their stage of greed.

Right here in Oregon there are mountains of proof about how big business, protected by the state and federal governments, rip us off daily. How much profit did Weyerhaeuser make last year? How much taxes did the company pay on those profits, if any? How come those who slave their lives away for George Weyerhaeuser get none of those profits? How come Weyerhaeuser can continue to pay small

pollution fines and isn't made to install anti-pollution systems? The answers to these kinds of questions will teach us just who George Weyerhaeuser is and what he really cares about. Those cute commercials we see on TV are a snow job to keep us from seeing the truth.

There are a few people in this state who know that the Wah Chang plant, just north of Albany - right there on the freeway - is killing the pure air and water and even the earth, so highly valued by Oregonians. For years we thought it was a smelly pulp mill but that was a lie! It is, in fact, the manufacturer of zirconium, a metal vital to the government's plan to pursue nuclear energy and warfare without properly considering the potential death and destruction in case of the slightest accident. Wah Chang dumps radioactive poison into our lives every day! Their fines are minimal, they are not seriously made to clean up and say that they shouldn't have to. The workers are in very real danger of serious illness or injury and even death.

The university of Oregon has \$3 million invested in stock in 28 South African companies. The State Board of Education has passed the buck to the Attorney General who has passed the buck to the State Treasurer. The State of Oregon finances the most racist and genocidal government in the world. The mountains of proof are everywhere.

Prisons are big business too. Nationally, the annual profits reach \$2 billion. Prisons promote "terrorism" by making the denial of human and democratic rights a respectable and common thing. Look at who is in prison and why - 75% of all adults in amerikkkan prisons are Third World people. This is clear and simple proof of systematic racism. Right now in Oregon there are three cruel and unusual punishment suits - one at Oregon Correctional Institution, one at Oregon State Penitentiary, and one at McClaren Juvenile prison. Every person in this state should investigate these suits in their own interest. We all know it's the powerless working and poor people who go to jail. The real criminals - the rich - are pardoned by other rich criminals or go to country club estates to do short time. (Or, they can get "daddy" to put up \$1.2 million for bail after conviction.)

I am a woman who is greatly concerned that the biggest areas of neglect in the so called justice system are rape, wife battering, and child abuse. The womyn of today suffers every day from the oppression of sexism. Everywhere she looks she sees sexist stereotypes that scream: you are a sex object - you can't control your own body - men need to beat you sometimes - there is no such thing as rape, you must have asked for it. And if she can't cope with this insanity the male-dominated medical profession pronounces her crazy. 90% of patients in mental hospitals are wimmin.

I am a lesbian - a womyn who totally loves wimmin. A womyn who loves herself and her sisters. A womyn who is proud to say that loving wimmin is a very beautiful and positive aspect of my life. When any womyn or man decides to be openly gay - to "come out" - we risk social disapproval, police harassment, and the

very real possibility of being beaten in the streets. We are denied jobs, thrown out of public places, refused housing, our children can be stolen from us, and most shrinks still think we suffer from some incurable sexual illness. This blatant discrimination is the systematic denial of our democratic and human rights. It should never be a crime for any person to love and care about another person. The freedom to be what we are is what we all fight for! Wimmin loving wimmin and men loving men is nothing new. Since the beginning of humanity we have loved, free and proud. Our culture, though sparsely documented due to the great efforts to suppress our herstory/history, does exist. During the time of Sappho and Isle of Lesbos, our sexuality was open and accepted. Then the self-appointed rulers - the profiteers - marched across the earth and for boots they wore suppression. Suppression to crush all those who wouldn't conform to their ideas or recognize their right to destroy our various ways of life. We have been mighty warriors in many wars - Amazons and Romans. Not even Hitler, who killed us in one of his first experiments in annihilation, could destroy us. Joe McCarthy hunted us too. Today, the fear of homosexuality promoted by the "masters of unreason" encourages Anita Bryant-types of fascist campaigns based on hysteria and ignorance. This kind of institutionalized fear is repeatedly used to keep us from building strong resistance. It will work less and less as we learn to understand the tactics of psychological warfare used by the rich to keep all of us in our places. But, we must remain alert to the very real threat of fascism and destroy it before we find ourselves surrounded.

I love children. To me children are the most beautiful, honest, sincere, and creative of human beings. It is for their future as well as my own that I fight. My heart full of love for all people. My heart full of rage at the capitalist/imperialist system that traps and destroys us from birth. I am the anger of the people like the thunder that comes before the rain that will heal the earth.

It is necessary to define "armed struggle" and "terrorism" since these terms are often and incorrectly used interchangeably. This error is continually made by the straight media who often just take orders from the FBI and other government gestapos. The press forgets its real job is to report the facts to the people - not to use sensationalism merely to sell a particular channel or newspaper, and not to participate in news blackouts which keep the facts from the people. "Terrorism" is armed action which deliberately and callously ignores the welfare of the people. It is the institutionalized sick violence of the ruling class and its police forces: the senseless bombings of Viet Nam; the Attica massacre; the Kent State massacre; the Jackson State massacre; the individual murders of Clifford Glover, Karen Silkwood, and George Jackson; the continuing murders and sterilizations of Native Americans and Puerto Ricans; the inhumane method of confinement suffered by Assata Shakur. "Armed struggle" is the use of controlled violence such as armed occupations, kidnappings, prisoner escapes, armed robberies, bombings, etc. A primary factor is that concern for the welfare of innocent people is *always* a vital part of the planning

and execution of these actions. Freedom fighters around the world have consistently made the distinction between revolutionary “armed struggle” against the ruling class and the “terrorism” of random violence used by the state against the people.

I am an anti-authoritarian lesbian feminist anarcho-communist! I am an urban guerrilla committed to give my white life if necessary! As our comrade brother George Jackson said - and it's just as true today as it was almost 10 years ago when he said it - “We must come together, understand the reality of our situation, understand that fascism is already here, that people are already dying who could be saved, that generations will die or live butchered half-lives if we fail to act.”

Love and Rage - Fire and Smoke,

Rita

2/21/78

# A SHORT AUTOBIOGRAPHY

*BY ED MEAD*



I was one of six children raised by a single mother who was homesteaded near Fairbanks, Alaska. When I was twelve during the mid-'50s, me and my sisters chopped a crude road into unsurveyed land they were about to homestead. We subsequently built a log cabin, drilled a well, and endured a whole lot of poverty. During the next ten years I pretty much ran wild, without the social or moral restraints imposed on most young men by parents, peers, church, school, and other means of public information and conditioning. I was first incarcerated at the age of thirteen, at the State Industrial School for Boys in Ogden, Utah (Alaska did not have a juvenile institution at the time so I was subjected to out-of-state banishment at a very young age), for burning down a large structure on school grounds. By the time I was eighteen, I was serving a three-year sentence in the Federal Prison at Lompoc, California, for burglarizing a gas station (Alaska did not have a state prison at the time).

I was subsequently released on parole, violated the conditions of my supervision and was sent back to federal prison. At this point my life became a cliché of recidivism. I was in and out several times, mostly in, doing life on the installment plan. Then during the late '60s, while serving a ten-year attempted escape sentence at the federal prison at McNeil Island, Washington, I came into possession of some radical literature. Until then I supported the war in Vietnam. Not because I believed in the justice of the U.S. cause, but because I had heard some older men say something to the effect of: "We ought to bomb that place into the Stone Age and then pave it over and make a parking lot out of it." In the absence of an opinion of my own, I would have parroted something to that effect. But the anarchist and Marxist literature I was reading enabled me to intelligently choose sides.

Those who supported the war also advocated for longer sentences, the elimination of parole, and favored the death penalty. Those who opposed the war demanded an end to prison construction, freedom for prisoners, and the leftists opposed the death penalty. When McNeil Island prisoners went on a work strike,

the singer Pete Seeger and actress Jane Fonda were on the docks with six hundred people demonstrating in support of the striking prisoners. The Weathermen busted Timothy Leary out of prison, and they were bombing the government. Choosing sides was easy, and, having done it, I've never looked back.

Released by a federal court order in 1972, I left Alaska and moved to Seattle to "join the revolution." I was active in Seattle's progressive political community for several years, until I was arrested in 1975 during an unsuccessful bank expropriation by the George Jackson Brigade. The Brigade had been conducting acts of armed propaganda such as bombings and financed itself through bank robberies. Convicted and sentenced to two consecutive life terms by the state of Washington on two counts of first-degree assault against police officers (because of a shootout at the bank), I was sent to the Washington State Penitentiary at Walla Walla. It was there that I organized Men Against Sexism.

After serving eighteen years, I was released in 1993. For nearly a decade I have worked as a network administrator for a nonprofit in San Francisco.

# IMPRISONED AND SEGREGATED

BY ED MEAD



It was a dark and ominous day when the prison's bus pulled up to transfer me and twenty other prisoners to the Washington State Penitentiary at Walla Walla? Actually, I do remember what the weather was like that day, though it was twenty years ago and the weather was one of the last things on my mind. As it happens, it was a beautiful summer day in early August 1976, when we left Shelton's Reception Units. The Penitentiary was located in the opposite corner of the state, as far away from Seattle as possible. Low rolling thunder clouds hovered over the whole area as our bus drew nearer and nearer to the prison; the wind blew in earthy smelling gusts. I experienced the feeling one gets just before an electrical storm, sensing the yet-to-be-discharged static electricity as it filled the hot afternoon air, as if looking for some channel though which to discharge its pent up energy. The atmosphere added a sense of dread to an already muggy day. A storm was certainly looming.

The relatively short amount of time I had to spend at the Shelton Corrections Center's Reception Units was delightfully uneventful. Shelton is where new inmates coming into the state's prison system are initially housed and processed. The short timers are weeded out and scheduled for transfer to minimum or medium custody facilities, while those serving long terms are sent to "The Walls," as the Penitentiary at Walla Walla is called. The Walls was considered to be the roughest, toughest, highest security prison in the state; the government's ultimate revenge, the end of the line, and the last stop for many men. I knew it might be that for me, not only because of my long prior record, but also because I had a new sentence of two consecutive life terms.

I had just finished eight months of difficult confinement in Seattle's King County jail. During that time I went through both the state and federal trials and the respective sentencing procedures. The barbarity of the jail experience would prove to be just a warm up for what was to come.

While in the jail I was locked up in what they then called the Annex, which was a section of the jail used as the segregation unit. I did not start out in the hole,



but a fellow prisoner, Mark LaRue, who was certainly well meaning but nonetheless a bit of a bumbler, decided to send me a note outlining a plot to riot and escape. I was in the jail's mess hall having a meal and minding my own business. Mark walked by the table I was eating at, and as he passed he dropped the incriminating note on the floor, the one outlining his grand scheme to riot, take hostages, escape, etc. The only problem was that the guards became aware of the note before I did, and they snatched it up before I could get to it. That was the end of my stay in the jail's main population. It was the death knell to any escape plans I may have been visualizing in my own mind.

In the Annex, where I was to spend the remainder of my time in the King County Jail, the walls and ceilings of the cells were made of metal, and if an inmate beat on them just right, they would reverberate with a resonance that would shake much of the building. We did not put this knowledge into practice until our treatment in the Annex became so bad that we that we were forced to initiate a series of protests. First we did do some serious banging on the walls. The noise soon became so bad that the judges in the courtrooms located below the jail started complaining to the guards, demanding that they do something about it. And they did — by running in on us with pressurized gallon sized jugs of mace, a chemical agent that burns the eyes and lungs, which was supposedly designed to be used only in open areas to disrupt street riots and what not.

They must have pumped gallons of mace in on us, in an area with no air circulation except what little came in through the Annex's solid steel door, which was usually open. After the macing, though, the door was closed and we were left to cook in the foul gaseous air for nearly twenty-four hours. They pumped the stuff in through the vents at the back of our cells. As they squirted the irritating agent through the top vent of my cell, I would jump up on my bunk and try to cover the opening with a towel, to prevent it from entering the cell, then they would shoot the stuff in through the bottom vent. When I dropped down to cover that one, they would squirt the mace in to my cell from the top vent again. And while one guard was doing that to my cell, faceless others were in the plumbing walkway behind the cells doing the same thing to all of the other men on the tier. When they finally left us alone the floors and walls of our cells were dripping with mace, and our mattresses and bedding was soaked with the stuff. We were left to cook in the unventilated summer heat of the Annex until nearly noon of the following day.

I had witnessed the beating of prisoners and many other less dramatic crimes against prisoners at the King County Jail, conditions which apparently became even worse later. As always seems to happen, when the beating of prisoners fails to cause the desired behavior, guards take to killing them. After I left the jail, I read that guards used the infamous choke hold to kill some black prisoners. The guards, like their police counterparts on the streets, were routinely found using "justified" force in the murder of unarmed captives. This form legalized murder

has an effect more immediate than the simple killing of a recalcitrant prisoner, in that it works to communicate to other captives the high cost of being insufficiently submissive.

I was in the jail with two life sentences given to me by the state. The term would probably have been half that except for my big mouth. My trial attorney, David Allen, talked to the judge before I was sentenced and was told that he, the judge, was going to impose a single life sentence. Armed with that knowledge and angry with the severity of even that much time, at sentencing the next day, when the court asked me if I had anything to say, I told him: "I have been framed and railroaded — like all poor people who appear before this court." The judge then turned a livid red. He was clearly flustered as he stammered through the imposition of two consecutive life terms. The way I saw it was that one of the life sentences was for the assaults, and the other was for the crime of having a smart mouth. In a country espousing free speech, no one deserves a life sentence for something they have merely said. Especially since what I said was true. I never did have a police officer in my gun sights, I was not trying to kill or even wound anyone. I was trapped in the bank with no means of escape. It would have been stupid of me to try and shoot someone at that point. My gunfire was merely a means to secure a negotiated surrender; to let the murderous police know that this was not going to be a slaughter.

The prosecutor's version of events was substantially different, of course. He said that "[o]n January 23, 1976, the defendant[s] ... attempted to rob the Tukwila branch of the Pacific National Bank of Washington. They were armed with a 9mm automatic, a .38 caliber revolver, and a sawed-off shotgun. The purpose of the robbery was to take money to purchase automatic weapons and explosives to further the activities of the 'George Jackson Brigade.' Detective Joseph Mathews of the Tukwila Police Department arrived in front of the bank and the defendant and Seidel began to shoot him. Detective Mathews returned the fire and hit Seidel. Simultaneously a fourth robber, waiting across the street, began to fire at Detective Mathews. Detective Mathews returned two rounds in this direction, and the other person left. At this time Officer Robert Abbott arrived and Seidel fired one round at him, knocking out a light on the patrol car. Abbott then returned fire with one round which struck Seidel in the chest and killed him." It has been this official version of the incident that I've had to live with during the subsequent course of my incarceration.

The sentences handed down in those days were really capricious. For example, there was a guy in the jail with me who had a long history of killing and raping women. They convicted him for doing that to several women in this state. He received a single five to life term. Whereas I, who had never harmed anyone, or had never before been so much as arrested for a crime of violence, was stuck with two 20-to-life beefs running wild. Hell, Cuban exile Virgilio Paz Romero, who was convicted and sentenced in federal court for the 1976 planting of a car

bomb that killed former Chilean Ambassador Orlando Letelier and his assistant, Lonnie Moffit, in Washington, D.C. Romero received a twelve year term for these two murders. With a third deducted for good time, the very most he would have to serve would be eight years. According to the U.S. government's Bureau of Justice Statistics, more than half the convicted murderers released from state prisons in 1983 were back on the streets after spending less than seven years behind bars. I am not saying these people are serving too little time, as murderers have the lowest recidivism rate of any other offender. What I am saying is that my state sentence was too harsh.

So from the jail I went to Shelton. I don't remember much about life there other than being locked up in a cell much of the time. They did call me in one day to take a psychological test, the MMPI, which is based on the outlook of some white middle-class farmers in Minnesota. If you don't answer these questions like the white farmers would, then you are considered abnormal. And not being "normal" or "average" in America is nearly a crime. So there we were, a whole room full of newly arrived prisoners and a couple of non-uniformed cops (no doubt counselors of some sort). They passed out a copy of the test to each us, and told us to complete all the questions.

I immediately refused to take the test, telling the guy that doing so would be a violation of my rights to privacy. One of the cops then told me I must take it. I again declined. He then became even more verbally insistent. I told him that if he wants me to take the test, he is going to have to physically pick up my hand and make it mark on the answer sheet, as I won't do it on my own. He saw that I was serious and ordered me out of the room. I had entertained a hope that some of the other prisoners would follow suit, but none did so. Like obedient sheep they all submitted to the invasion of their most private thoughts by the state. Guess it was their training in school that conditioned them in this regard.

Some years later, in connection with pending litigation, I was able to obtain copies of documents setting out what the testers had to say about me. They said: "Psychological tests were refused. He claims that tests are irrelevant (sic), inaccurate, outdated and an invasion of his personal privacy. His attitude was adamant refusal without compromise. He was released from testing."

Actually, refusing to subject myself to the testing was a smart move on my part. But I followed it up with something stupid. I was called in for a psychological interview by Shelton's psychologist Felix E. Massaia and psychiatrist P.B. Smith. I don't know why I agreed to talk to them; perhaps because I had been ambushed, rather than given the time to think about whether or not I wanted to talk to them. They did a three page report on me that was not all that negative, but that would later be misused by the state's parole board. What the report said, in essence, is that I saw myself as a revolutionary. That should not come as any surprise to people. They said I came across "as a relaxed, affable, and articulate individual. Mr. Mead

presented himself as a revolutionary who was imprisoned by his 'captors' as he perceived himself as being 'at war' with society's institutions and systems."

The part of this July 26, 1976, psychological report that really hurt me was when the interviewers said: "Mr. Mead presented himself much as he did in court where he viewed his actions in his 'war' as being justified, thus his robbing of a bank being 'an appropriate expropriation,' and his setting of bombs which destroyed the Laurelhurst Power Substation as well as the offices of the Division of Adult Corrections in the Capitol Center Building in Olympia as an acceptable 'tactic' in his fight. Mr. Mead acknowledged by intimation that his group in this area was linked with the groups that have identified themselves as being part of the George Jackson Brigade in other areas such as California where they were involved in a bombing in San Francisco, and banks in Santa Barbara."

No group in any other part of the country, Santa Barbara or elsewhere, ever claimed to be a part of the GJB. Moreover, the Brigade never conducted any bombing actions outside of Washington State. But the parole board would subsequently use this bogus information against me, claiming that the quoted material constituted a confession to all those crimes. That it was patently false on its face and would carry no weight at all.

The psychological report concluded by saying that "he does not primarily fit into any particular category of the D&SM (a diagnostics manual used by psychologists) as he is difficult to 'pigeon hole,' as he has a great deal of insight and is very much aware of the internal dynamics operant in his personality configuration, and thus definitely not a person who could be categorized as being 'psychiatrically ill.'" The good lying doctors went on to finish their report with the following recommendation: "It is anticipated that Mr. Mead will make a satisfactory adjustment to confinement as long as he does not perceive himself as being singled out for discriminatory negative attention and [is] allowed to live as any other resident." Prison officials at the penitentiary would have been well advised to pay special heed to the wisdom of that recommendation. But of course they would not.

Anyway, I was shipped out to the State Penitentiary at Walla Walla, traveling in an old prisoner transport vehicle not so affectionately referred to as the Green Goose by its unwilling passengers. The bus carried a maximum of 21 people. It was August of 1976 and it was hot inside the fully loaded bus. Sweating prisoners were hand cuffed to chains looped around their waists and connected to the similarly restrained man next to them. We all wore leg irons as well. The arrangement was called a chain. The trip took what seemed like six hours. During that time if a prisoner had to use the toilet facilities, which consisted of an open and very smelly bucket at the back of the small bus, he got permission from a guard to shuffle like a penguin back to the bucket, where, with hands chained, they did their best to urinate as the bus merrily bounced its way over the bumpy highway.

As the tiring journey came near to an end, the passengers on the bus looked

off into the direction of the prison with a strange mixture of dread and anxiousness. We were happy to be at the end of this unpleasant trip, yet felt considerable foreboding for what lies ahead. We had heard many terrible stories about the prison while in the county jail. The old timers who had been to WSP before suddenly grew in stature, for they knew the ropes. Everyone was looking for the prison, and those who had been there were telling the rest of us where to look. When the prison finally came into view, I felt like I was seeing the outside of a place I would not be seeing the outside of again for a long time. I took a mental picture of the still distant prison and the surrounding area, just in case I might be able to at some point escape. The late afternoon sky was dark with humid clouds that appeared to want to burst into thunder. The land was flat, the endless wheat fields broken only by occasional outbuildings and the fences that separated them.

We pulled up to the prison and entered the double-gated sally port. With the first gate closed behind us, prison guards casually inspected the bus for possible concealed weapons or other bulky forms of contraband. Then we were passed through the second set of gates and into the prison proper. The bus was driven behind a large red brick building where it came to a stop. We were ordered to disembark. Marching two by two, the chain stepped off the bus and into the innards of the prison. Greeting us was a tough-voiced sergeant who read the new prisoner's names from a clipboard and barked orders regarding our housing assignments. Also greeting us was a gathering of bored Walla Walla prisoners, who used the weekly arrival of the chain as a mild diversion from the prison's humdrum daily routine. Some came to look for friends coming in from the county jail, and if they saw them they would exchange greetings or instructions. Some came simply to gawk at the new fish. And some, the predators, came to look over the meat for possible prey — the young and more vulnerable newcomers who did not have any friends to protect them.

Those who had partners on the inside would get shouts from their friends like: "Hey Bob, tell 'em you want to move into 6-E-21; I've already put in a kite for you." Others, the young and fair, might get embarrassing catcalls of one sort or another. "Oh, look at that one, ain't she pretty." And so on. Those who had a place to go and friends were the lucky ones. The rest of us would be immediately placed in a four-man cell with three strangers. And the cells were so small that the three already there generally resented the addition of the newcomer. I was one of those who knew no one at the prison, but at 33 I was also fairly old and con-wise enough to escape the notice of the sexual predators and their wanna be counterparts. When my name was called I was given a cell number, had my chains and cuffs removed, and then followed those before me into the back door of the brick building. It was the clothing room. We were issued new clothing and some old but clean bedding, and directed out the front door. Those who had friends were picked up and the reunion began. Those who had been there before knew where they were going, and

went there either by themselves or with a newly-made buddy from the county jail.

I stood in front of the clothing room alone, looking out on the innards of the prison. Inmates wandered around in small groups, not acting like they had any place to go. What struck me was the age and filthiness of the place. The many huge buildings were all made of red brick. Just about everything on the ground level looked dirty and crowded. The place impressed me as having been put together without much planning. The buildings were designed in different styles, reflecting the age in which they were built. The old ones you could tell from their architectural style were quite old, and their bricks and concrete at the lower levels were chipped and falling away. Small swirls of dust and litter blew across a big dirt-filled open area which I would later learn was Peoples' Park.

I suddenly felt more insecure and insignificant than I'd felt in a long time. I was also experiencing a fear that I would never leave this terrible place; that I would be trapped in this little space for a lifetime.

With the blowing dust gritting between my dry teeth, I threw my bundle up on my shoulders and ventured out into the prison. I asked a passing inmate how to find Six.

Six Wing was a huge cellblock containing stacked tiers of what should have been one man cells, but which were crowded with four prisoners. It was like a bee hive, abuzz with the sound of men settling in for the soon-to-come evening count. The air was bad with the smell of too many bodies, the poor ventilation not being able to keep up with the load. And the inadequate lighting contributed to the hive-like atmosphere of the building. I found my way to the cell that was assigned to me without too much trouble. It was occupied by a man who I would later learn was a jailhouse lawyer called Doc. Doc's other cell partners were kitchen workers and would not return until later in the evening. We had a brief but friendly talk until count time was announced over the cellblock's loud speakers, whereupon the goon squad suddenly appeared at the bars in front of the cell. They ordered me out, cuffed my hands behind my back, and then escorted me to Big Red, the name prisoners gave to the two-story brick building that was the institution's segregation unit. It appeared as if I was indeed going to be "singled out for discriminatory negative attention."

Being processed into the hole was not much different than all of the other forms of degradation prisoners must experience on a daily basis. As it happened there was another prisoner being processed when I entered the unit. We each had to remove all of our clothing in front of the gawking guards, then allow them to look into our mouths and ears; lift our scrotum and penis so they can examine under them; turn around, bend over, and spread the cheeks of our ass so they can supposedly check to see if there is any contraband hidden inside us. The other guy being processed with me was a few years younger than me and more slightly built. I didn't speak to him, nor he to me, as each of us were caught up in our own

humiliations.

When the guards were done with us they threw us each a pair of oversized blue coveralls and led us to B tier, one of the four tiers making up the hole. I was assigned to cell 13, the other guy was put next door to me, in cell 14. I looked around the tiny cell. It was dank, painted barf green, and filthy. There was a more or less round patch of brown mud-like material smeared on the wall over the bunk. It was about three feet in diameter. I could tell by the smell and texture that it was human fecal matter — shit! It took a moment for the shock to wear off, then I yelled out to the guard, telling them that I wanted a different cell. After awhile a guard came onto the tier and I showed him the filthy wall and demanded a move. He told me that there would be no cell change, as such matters were ordered by the assignment officer and could not be changed. I then asked for cleaning materials, but was told that would have to be obtained during the following day, as his shift did not issue supplies.

Temporarily resigned to my fate, I made my bunk and started cleaning the cell as best I could without actually touching the any of the bugger-infested, shit-smeared walls. Supper had just been served in the segregation unit and most of the 24 prisoners on the tier were either taking naps or reading. It was mostly quiet, with only an occasional snatch of conversation between the cells. No one paid any attention to me.

It must have been around seven o'clock in the evening when they started letting selected prisoners out for their one hour exercise periods. While I didn't know it at the time, most prisoners on B tier spent 23 hours a day in their cells, although there were about six men who served as "trustees" and spent considerably more time outside their cells (but still on the tier). These were the toughest men in the toughest prison in the state. Some of them were in the hole serving administration segregation time or awaiting trial for murdering other prisoners. I did not pay a whole lot of attention to what was going on outside my cell, the traffic of prisoners exercising and talking with other friends on the tier. One guy stopped by my cell on his way to the front of the tier to use the phone. He said his name was Danny Atteberry, and that he and a couple of others on the tier were in the hole for participating in the December 1974 takeover. He said he knew of me and of course was supportive of the work the George Jackson Brigade had been doing in their behalf. He named the other rioters and hostage takers as Joe Green, Mark LaRue, and, to some extent, Carl Harp. I knew most of the names of these men and was happy to learn that there were some friends on the tier.

At about nine that evening events took a very ugly turn. A gang of about six prisoners decided they wanted to rape the prisoner in the cell next to mine, the kid who was booked into the seg unit with me. I could not believe my ears when the sound of their efforts to get his door opened invaded my peaceful reality. The guard on the end to the tier was at the lockbox trying to open the door of cell 14



so these guys could get in and rape him. I sprang from my bunk and looked out the bars at the front of the cell at the unfolding scene. The victim was holding a book in the bars, preventing the sliding door from opening. His attackers were trying to grab the book, he'd pull it back, the guard would attempt to open the door again, and my neighbor would stick the book back in the bars. The rapo gang of prisoners, lead by a muscularly built black man awaiting trial for murder, then went to the sink at the end of the tier and obtained a pitcher of hot water, which they threw on the man trying to defend himself. Still he would not let them get the book or to stay far away enough from the bars for the guard to be able to open it.

I was afraid to shout out in the other man's defense, fearful that the mob would turn on me. I just stood there, wallowing in anguish for both of us, and hating myself for not taking a more firm stand. Who knows, had it gone on much longer or if they had gained entrance to the cell I may have actually done something, like demanding that they stop. On the other hand, maybe I would have continued to tremble in fear. But the guard gave up and that ended all hope of the prisoners getting into the younger man's cell. It isn't often that I am confronted with an ethical or moral issue that also appears to be a question of life and death. It is not a good feeling. I didn't sleep well that night.

The next morning my cell door opened and I was released, along with the men on each side of me, for my one hour exercise and shower period. The first thing I did was to clean the walls of the cell. I then went to talk with Atteberry, Green, and LaRue about the events of the night before. They shared my sense of outrage but were unwilling to physically confront the gang of rapo killers. Only one man said he would take a fighting stand, and that was Carl Harp. He was understandably reluctant and his support shaky, but it was a start. I also talked to one of the old timers on the tier, a respected prisoner and escape artist I will call Art. Art told me not to get too riled up about what was happening, as the "kid" was a punk anyway and would be giving his ass away if people weren't trying to take it. Art told me that at Walla Walla prisoners are raped all the time, even bought and sold by other prisoners — that's the way it is. I was amazed, and answered that this attitude must be altered if we are to ever make progress at changing conditions in the hole. While it did not appear as if I made much progress during my hour, I later learned that Danny, Art, and the others spent their times on the tier talking to members of the "gang" about what is right and wrong for prisoners to be doing. The change was not deep, but a new mood nonetheless came into being on the tier. The followers had fallen away from the rapo leader, which was a positive development. On the negative side, the big rapo took this turn of events as a challenge to his masculinity, and he clearly saw me as the cause of the change. It seemed to me that he'd decided that in order to prove himself a real man he must rape my neighbor. It may sound dumb today, but back then maleness was not something that was biologically determined, but rather manliness was a state of being that had to be reinforced and proven every



day, most often at someone else's expense.

The next morning the rapo was out on the tier first. He promptly set up camp in front of the bars of my cell and started his exercise routine, jumping rope directly in front of me. His shirt was off and his massive muscles rippled with sweat as he worked out like the professional he was. In addition to being a well-developed weight lifter, my new friends would soon tell me that this guy had been a professional boxer on the streets. This demonstration of the rapo's prowess certainly scared me, but when it was my time to exercise I took the jump rope down in front of his cell and did my rather pathetic workout. I was skinny, and not at all tough, yet I wanted to communicate the fact that he was not going to be able to make his move without some resistance from me. I did not particularly like the kid in the cell next to me. It was not for him that I was doing this, it was for the principle that preying on each other must be stopped.

That afternoon I found out that the rapo had his "yard period" changed so that he would be out on the tier with me and the kid the following morning. That night I got very little sleep. I was certain that come morning I would either die or be badly beaten up by this much stronger and far more vicious man. Morning finally came, of course, and when my door opened I stepped out onto the tier determined to put up as good a fight as I was capable of. The rapo had never spoken to me, and this particular morning was no exception. He went about his business of exercising as if I wasn't there. He did talk to the kid, but no rape took place. When it was time to lock up again I entered the cell with a great sense of relief.

A day or two later the rapo put in a move slip to be transferred to another tier, and he was gone soon after that. I subsequently learned that the reason he did not attack me was that I had succeeded in winning over public opinion on the tier. The George Jackson Brigade's bombing attack on the headquarters of the Department of Corrections and the FBI office in Tacoma, and other actions of the Brigade, had landed me a certain amount of moral authority on B tier. To have hurt or killed me would have been very bad politics on the part of the rapo. The cost of his not having done so was also expensive. His position as the prison's top dog was no longer intact. A short time later, while supposedly giving him a nose hit from a joint, two prisoners I will call Kevin and Andy, former members of his rapo entourage who had since joined him on D tier, attacked him with knives. He was badly stabbed but survived the assault. In any case, he was no longer a threat to me. Although Kevin and Andy would subsequently prove to be serious obstacles in the path of prisoner organizing. But that was in the future at this point. Right then my only thoughts were of trying to build something that would move things forward.

As days melted into months I fell into the day-to-day routine of life on B Tier, and, to some extent, was able to communicate with prisoners on the other three tiers of Big Red through the vents located in the back of each of our cells. But mostly I did a lot of talking with my fellow cons on the tier, particularly Danny,

Joe, Mark, and Carl, all of whom had participated in the December 1974 takeover of sections of the prison. I learned there had been long periods of spontaneous resistance to conditions in segregation, a resistance that sometimes took violent forms. From what I could gather the battle would run hot and cold, sort of like the principle seasons in that remote corner of Washington state. A few months earlier there had been tough fighting; a guard or two having been taken hostage by seg prisoners, convicts being beaten by their captors, prisoners throwing fecal matter on the cops as they came on to the tier, and the cops putting urine, bleach, and soap chips in the food and drink before serving it to the locked down prisoners. Then at some point there would be a change, a few token concessions tossed out by the warden, and the season of struggle would suddenly change again to one of peace and cooperation. Many of those who had participated in the earlier protests, like Kevin and Andy, would become friends with the cops (or at least certain of them), and those guards, our former enemies, would in turn pull trips like opening the prisoner's door for the attempted rape that took place on my first night in the unit. At that particular moment, the season was currently one of peace between the keepers and the kept in Walla Walla's segregation unit. That was the time when we most often victimized each other.

There was another young kid on B Tier, an innocent 20 year-old whose principle crime was probably one of being more confused than those around him. The youngster did not bother anyone else on the tier, and for the brief time he was with us tried to mind his own business. One night two guys on the tier, a couple of the wanna-be toughs, passed themselves off as new found friends to the kid by giving him some barbiturates. Once the young man was groggy from the drugs, the two of them went into his open cell and raped him. Then, in an effort to conceal their crime, they made him take a shower. Upon his return to the cell the two of them strangled the kid to death, then tied one end of a bed sheet around the victim's neck and the other end to the bars, and arranged the body so as to make it appear as if the youngster had committed suicide. While the police did not fall for the suicide ruse, they charged and convicted only one prisoner with the kid's murder. The other one made parole a short time later and went home. I've seen this sort of thing happen on more than one occasion; someone kills and/or rapes another person, then is turned right around and released. It was not the release but the murder that so deeply disturbed me.

Why did that happen? Why did prisoners prey on each other like that? One possible clarification, at least one that provided me with some measure of understanding, came from Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth*. Fanon was an Algerian psychiatrist who was educated in France, during the period France colonized his homeland. He wrote about his observations of the process through which his people developed the capacity to struggle against French imperialism. I will badly paraphrase what Mr. Fanon had to say on the subject of violence among

the oppressed: The phenomena is essentially part of a much needed cleansing process, one that prepares a nation for the struggle for liberation and revolution.

The Algerians in Fanon's book, not unlike Blacks in the ghettos of America or prisoners in the nation's gulags, internalized the oppression they were experiencing, and tended to take it out on each other in the form of what could be characterized as acts of self-hatred. This was not that unusual, considering the fact that the tribal people of Algeria considered the French colonialists to be gods of sorts, who could not be killed. Fanon noted that at first this violence manifested itself through intra-family conflicts; husbands beating their wives, women violently abusing their children, and so on. This domestic violence, according to Fanon, then slowly transformed itself into intra-tribal conflict. Men within the tribe drank and fought with each other, resulting in many deaths and injuries. The next phase of the process was one of inter-tribal violence, where now more or less united tribes fought against each other. As the process continued to unfold the tribes, now skilled in the application of violence, came together for the final phase. They started fighting the French occupiers and were eventually able to drive the foreign army from their land.

While I had some appreciation as to why prisoners would be preying on each other, I was nonetheless angry at the prisoner who killed the weaker youngster. The killer could not understand why I was so pissed; why his act of murdering someone else, not even a friend of mine, would bother me. He and I did not get along well after that. He was one of those people who for all his miserable life had been told he was a piece of shit, and he was treated accordingly. He ended up believing it, and behaved like a piece of shit. He had a lot of company in that regard, too. So there were conflicting trends in Big Red, and the prison in general. On the one hand there was this kind of cannibalism, with the prisoners raping and killing each other. And on the other hand, just as intense periods of blind, self-destructive resistance. I wanted to make prisoners more conscious and to lower their self-destructiveness. I knew it was going to be an uphill struggle.

Not too long after my placement on B tier of Big Red my direct appeal from the federal bank robbery conviction was pending in the U.S. Court of Appeals. I was acting as my own attorney on the appeal (as I did at trial) and had only a narrow time window within which to file my opening brief. The rules of the appeals court mandates that all briefs must be commercially printed, using an offset press (there were no laser printers and fancy word processors in those days), but in the case of indigent prisoners an exception was made. We could submit briefs prepared with only a typewriter. The problems was that there were no typewriters available to prisoners in Big Red, and my constant requests to the administration to provide me with the temporary use of one were routinely denied. Accordingly, I was forced to file a motion in the U.S. district court in Spokane, Washington, asking the federal judge to issue an order directing that I be given access to a typewriter for the limited purpose of perfecting my then-pending appeal.

The judge did issue the requested order, commanding that warden B.J. Rhay permit me to use an institutional typewriter for the purpose of typing my appellate brief. The warden ignored the court order. I reapplied to the court and received another order, this one providing a concrete deadline for compliance. The deadline came and went, and still there was no typewriter. I next filed a motion asking that Warden Rhay be found to be in contempt of court for his refusal to honor the court's orders. Subpoenas were issued for both of us and a contempt hearing was held at the federal courthouse in Spokane. The judge put the warden on the witness stand and found him to be in contempt of court. But the judge went on to tell Rhay that he could purge himself of his contempt by merely providing me with access to a typewriter. The warden said "Okay" and we all went back to the joint. I still didn't get the typewriter! I filed yet another motion, detailing the history of this issue and emphasizing the dwindling time frame within which my opening brief had to be filed. The court responded by rescinding all of its previous orders, leaving me with no typewriter and no avenue for relief. The warden had successfully worn down the judge's resolve and in the process once again defended the prison's tradition of being a law unto itself, immune to the rules that govern other agencies.

What I was not able to win in the courts I was able to achieve through persistent political effort. I did eventually manage to get an old state typewriter into my segregation cell. Perhaps B.J. Rhay could see further than the judge, as once my appeal was done I used the machine to put out a typewritten newsletter aimed at my fellow prisoners there in the hole. Typing away in my cell, and making as many carbon copies as I could, I wrote about the terrible conditions in Big Red, what it would take to change them, and who the real enemy is. I'll leave it to the reader's imagination to visualize the type of rhetoric I used back in those days. However clumsy my language may have been, though, it did get the message across to my desperate readers. The paper was surreptitiously passed from tier to tier, and then from cell to cell. Other prisoners wrote articles too, adding their voice to the call for a fight back. A struggle soon emerged.

It was while I was in the segregation unit that I got the idea of starting an organization aimed at ending to prisoner-on-prisoner rape. Although I had not yet spent much time in Walla Walla's general population, the steady flow of prisoners in and out of the hole, along with my own experiences in segregation, convinced me that the principle contradiction among prisoners was sexism — not white racism, as is the case at so many other institutions. But before any formal organizing could take place I would first have to get out of the hole.

My little newsletter continued to slowly influence the 96 men in Big Red. The struggle over the terrible conditions (beatings, the lack of programs, 23-hours a day lockup, poor sanitation, etc.) intensified; unity grew. We launched a series of meager work strikes in which seg porters refused to clean, we wrote victory slogans

on the walls of the unit, threw trash on the tiers and then burned it, filed lawsuits in federal court, and flooded the place by stopping up the toilets with sheets and then repeatedly flushing them. There were hunger strikes, demands submitted to prison officials, and articles written to progressive publications on the outside, such as Seattle's *Northwest Passage*.

This trend developed until all four tiers of the unit were working with what amounted to a single minded objective. We saw ourselves as being in what could be termed a continuous state of war with our captors. Slowly, taking one step backwards for every two steps forward, making mistakes and learning as we fought on, enough of us came to believe that we could win. We knew that what was being done to us was terribly wrong, and we came to the understanding that salvation would be achieved through ongoing struggle. We called ourselves the Walla Walla Brothers.

In each segregation cell there was a metal table that, when struck with the fleshy part of a clenched fist, produced a deep reverberation up and down the tier. It was a loud noise, one that had a rich depth of substance to it. I don't remember whose idea it was or how it came about, as the years have erased so many of these memories, but at the height of one particularly bitter and protracted round of strikes and protests we came to the conclusion that in order to prevail we would have to enlist the support of the population. Saying words to them would not be enough; it was only talk. Many people in the population had read our manifesto and the articles we had written on the nature of our brutalization in the Big Red hell hole. But what we said and wrote was just not enough to move them from a position of understanding and sympathy to that of direct and self-sacrificing support. We needed something more.

The drums did it. We knew what time the population was released from their cell blocks, one tier at a time, to walk to the mess hall and eat their meals. While one drummer was loud, a tier of 24 of them, banging together in rhythmic unison, was both a near-deafening and an empowering experience. And with four tiers of 24 men each doing it, the awesome sound was like waves of thunder rolling across the prison compound. Every day we did this, during each meal, until the balls of our fists were raw and painful. And still we banged on; not passively, like survivors trapped in the bowels of a capsized ocean liner, sending out periodic bumps for would-be rescuers, but rather we pounded like fighters beating out a confident call to comrades to join us in a most glorious struggle for justice.

Our reward was pretty quick in coming. After some three or four days of periodic pounding on our metal tables, days in which our captors did everything within their power to shut us up, we received word that the entire population was on a work strike. They had issued a list of fourteen demands; the first item on that list was the demand to rectify specified conditions in the segregation unit. The fate was now in the fire. We in the hole were at first ecstatic over this latest turn of

events, and rightly so. But the joy was quickly replaced with a dogged determination to win what was now a major political struggle. We had to redouble our efforts on all fronts, limited as they might be. Our energy was quickly devoted to cranking out more articles and supporting, in the small ways we could, our brothers in the population who were on strike.

The strike lasted for 47 days — the longest in state history. We would probably have needed to go on even longer had we not gotten some valuable armed support from the George Jackson Brigade. On day 43 the Brigade exploded a bomb at night in the safety deposit box of a branch of the Rainier bank in Seattle. The resulting blast got the attention of the powers that be; the G.J.B.'s accompanying communiqué to Seattle's radio stations gave them the message. The document pointed out how there was an interlocking directorship between the Rainier bank and the publisher of the state's leading newspaper, the *Seattle Times*. The communiqué pointed out that on nearly every one of the 43 days the prisoners at Walla Walls had been on strike, the news media carried completely one-sided stories about the event, including interviews with prison officials, guards, and various other forms of anti-prisoner propaganda. But never once during the unfolding course of this significant news event was the prisoners' side of the story ever told — not once was a single word of a prisoner quoted. The communiqué promised to continue bombing Rainier banks until Seattle Times adopted a more even handed approach to their coverage of this story.

Well, you wouldn't believe the sudden turn around in the mood of the state's population. Whereas on day 42 of the strike and on all of those before it, there was never so much as a hint that the prisoners might have a legitimate set of gripes. But on day 44 a prisoner was finally interviewed. I don't even think he was a part of the inside population, but one of the farm workers outside the walls. In any case, his few words were enough to start a statewide debate and to unleash what would soon be a flood of facts regarding the outrageous conditions of our existence. How legitimate were our complaints? Solid enough for public opinion to get behind us to the point that the Secretary of the Department of Corrections in the state capitol was fired, as was warden B.J. Rhay at the Penitentiary. The associate warden of custody, the man in charge of Big Red, was transferred to work at the kid's joint at Shelton, and we were all released from the hole (although not all at once).

When I tell this story it sounds like we had brave prisoners marching in unity and brotherhood toward the greater goals of goodness and decency. I don't want to idealize this period. Of course there were elements of unity in struggle, sharing our common boredom, the occasional rush of success, and the frequent setbacks. There were also the underlying contradictions among prisoners on the tier that manifested themselves through acts of violence, both real and threatened.

There was a small but vocal group of prisoners who appeared to dislike me, and who out of mere boredom were looking to kill someone. There were times

when I felt they were after me. This fear was strong enough to cause me to keep a home-made knife, and to have something like a big book near the door that I could use to prevent it from sliding open. The memory of the attempted rape of my neighbor was always fresh in my mind. The general atmosphere of violence in that place was totally alien and foreign to anything I had ever experienced before. My fear of this particular group came from the way they suddenly stopped talking as they came by my cell; the manner in which they would furtively glance into my cell, as if stalking me; on the intricacies of power politics as practiced on the tier; on who's on what side; who wants to kill whom; and on who had already killed whom in the past.

The small group of us calling ourselves the Walla Walla Brothers did everything we could to communicate a sense of struggle to other people on the tier. One day Danny took ketchup and, using it as paint, wrote "We Will Win!" in big letters on the burn-scarred back wall of the tier (this lettering can be seen on page 147 of Hoffman & McCoy's book *Concrete Mama*). We put up posters, I did my newsletter, we all talked to people one-on-one, and on occasion I even tried to get guys on the tier to sing politically inspirational songs. Yet with all this and much more, there were long periods in which it seemed that nobody was listening to us, that nothing we were doing would have an impact on reality. Not only was the prison administration not giving an inch, they instead intensified their efforts to take away from us what little we had left. At the same time some of the prisoners would continue to prey on each other, in all sorts of ways.

When this would change, when people were at their best, was when our material conditions were at their worst. Being stripped of everything but your undershorts, enduring fires on the tier, the stench of urine on the walls mixed with the smoke from the fires, and the beatings inflicted by the guards. The bottom line was often reduced to one of total resistance; nothing between "them" and "us" except a near perfect hatred. I would feel good when we were together like that, and when the situation was one of clear and undisputable injustice. I still vividly remember being in the third or fourth day of a hunger strike, or all of us rattling the bars of our cages together and hollering as a single voice. At those times it was clear who the enemy was and we would feel powerful, in spite of our stark conditions of existence.

So life for me in Big Red during those days vacillated between fear and despair on the one hand, versus exhilaration and hope on the other. And of course there were both the dull and the exciting times in between the two extremes of this duality. It was within this context that I started exploring the feminine aspect of my nature, coming out to myself and the people around me as a homosexual, and learning to accept that in myself. Some of these men I disliked, others of them I loved. I wanted the capacity and freedom to deepen these latter feelings by giving them a sexual expression. However homosexuals and anything feminine were really



looked down upon in prison. Woman-like behavior or mannerisms were considered to be a sign of weakness, and those who displayed it were fair game for victimization. The very worst insult one could call someone was to equate them with a woman's sexuality; a bitch, cunt, etc. Women were never referred to in any complimentary way. It was a case of the totally powerless seeking some way through which they could obtain some semblance of control by oppressing others perceived as being less strong than themselves. About the best most prisoners could muster would be to refer to a woman they knew as a "girl." Gays were objects of derision. In the prison's hierarchy of status, homosexuals were just a step above child molesters.

My coming out was not the result of some driving sexual desire for men, or any individual man, it was more the product of a rational intellectual and political decision that slowly formulated itself in my consciousness. I had just returned to prison with a double life sentence and a relatively high consciousness of women's issues. I decided that women did not need yet another man to drain their energy — that if my emotional and sexual needs were going to be met, they would be met by men. I'd occasionally had sex with men in the past while living on the outside, so the notion of sex with men wasn't at all abhorrent to me. At this same time, the idea of organizing Men Against Sexism was germinating in my head. I don't know if that sounds opportunist or not — adjusting my sexual attitudes to fit the group of people I most wanted to reach — but I wanted to stop sexual slavery in the prison. And I would do it as a member of the victim group rather than as an outsider. Furthermore, I genuinely loved people like Danny Atteberry, Mark LaRue, Carl Harp, and Joe Green. I loved them as intensely as I feared so many other people on the tier.

One of the things that fed my fear was that in most situations you could deal with violence, there would be a set of rules (even if irrational), so one could nonetheless learn to live with the threat. But the violence at Walla Walla didn't follow any rules; it was random, senseless, and over stupid things not worth a second word. So I feared that it would strike me, and I didn't feel confident enough that I could effectively deal with the confrontations that even at the best of times seemed to loom just near the edge of my awareness. In a word, I was insecure. I didn't know what else to do but to throw myself and all the strength I could gather up against the administration. If I was to go down it would be at the hands of my real enemies, the government and the tiny class that controls it, not the confused products of their system. When I had doubts as to whether I'd survive the next day, when the hatred, bitterness and tension on the tier became too oppressive, I'd do what I could to intensify the struggle against our captors. My thinking was that if somebody was going to knife me in the back, it would at least be clear that their having done so was an act of open collaboration with the pigs.

I've been trying to convey a sense of what it was like to live on the tier during those days, and it is a hard task because a lot of things don't make all that



much sense. The bottom line is that after nine months in the hole my friends and I were released to the general population. We'd survived one hell and were on the threshold of another. We now had a freshly appointed Secretary of the Department of Corrections in Olympia, a more liberal warden, and a new associate warden of custody. We also had a collective measure of respect from most prisoners because of the successful seg struggle. But for me and some of my friends, nothing had really changed. Just as coming from the streets to prison had merely been a change in fronts on which to fight, so too in our eyes was the move from seg to the population. There was still much work to be done.

# MEN AGAINST SEXISM

*BY ED MEAD*



It was the summer of 1977, and I'd just been released from the hole and was entering the population for the first time. I moved from the segregation unit into cell B-6 of Eight Wing, a four-man cell located on the flats that was "owned" by a comrade named Danny. Yes, cells were owned by individual prisoners and bought and sold much like real estate on the streets. One had to be approved by the owner in order to move into a cell. If the administration moved a fish [a new inmate, among those most vulnerable to sexual assault] into a cell, he would generally be permitted to stay for two or three days while he looked for another place to live. Beyond that his stuff would be thrown out on their tier and he'd have to fend for himself. In any case, I was fortunate enough to be moving into a cell already owned by a friend. I did not have to play the musical cage game so many other prisoners were subjected to. A guy I will call Joe was already in the cell when I moved in. He was the first of us released from the hole, and shortly after I was turned loose, Danny and his friend Mark followed. The cell itself was designed for two men but contained four beds, two bunk beds along each of the dingy cobalt blue walls.

Joe was the cell's sound man. The noise outside the cell was a cacophony of loud radios and blaring televisions, all playing on different stations and channels. On top of that, prisoners added to the general sense of pandemonium by yelling at each other between tiers; trading coffee, insults, and gossip in loud voices. What Joe would do is set his portable tape deck near the bars at the front of the cell, with the speakers aimed inward, and then he'd crank up the volume until there was a virtual wall of sound that drowned out all other external noise. The effect of Joe's artistry in this regard was awesome. The tape deck was not playing uncomfortably loud, yet there was not another sound beyond its sensitively balanced speakers. Of course Joe's choice of music was such that there were few silences, either between notes or between songs – not unlike the heavy metal of today. And while Aerosmith and the absence of any silence was stressful, it was far better than the noise it replaced.

There were sixteen or seventeen hundred prisoners in the population at Walla Walla and only enough jobs for a portion of them. I did not have to work

and thus was able to devote the bulk of my time to prison politics; talking to fellow convicts and trying to learn more about local concerns. I was also trying to adjust to this very different reality. Rape was clearly an issue. Prisoners were being routinely bought and sold by each other; the young and vulnerable ones were raped and then subjected to forced prostitution. While there was general agreement that this was wrong, there was no support within the population for a group like Men Against Sexism. Straight prisoners were not going to put their prison status and personal safety on the line for gays, and for the most part the gay population was too demoralized or defeated to stand up for itself.

While our decisions were not as conscious and straightforward as I might tend to make them sound, those of us in the cell did manage to slowly develop an agenda of sorts. We were going to work with the existing Resident Government Council (RGC) toward forming an RGC-sponsored subgroup called the Prison Justice Committee (PJC). The Seattle branch of the American Friends Services Committee (AFSC), an offshoot of the Quaker Church with a long and progressive tradition of involvement in prison issues, agreed to support our organizing efforts.

Building the Prison Justice Committee was not a very difficult task. We were to some extent leaders of the recently victorious forty-seven-day strike. If we believed that an arm of the RGC should be formed that called itself the Prison Justice Committee, then influential members of the population would be more than happy to support the proposal. Most prisoners agreed that it was important to build upon and to consolidate the gains and promises achieved as a result of the strike, and that's what the PJC was trying to do. The PJC was led by a former segregation graduate named Eddwynn Jordan. He and his brothers were well-respected members of the black prison population, with long histories of struggle. I was the group's vice chairperson. So the PJC was organized and schedule of meetings established. From the very start, attendance at PJC meetings exceeded that of its parent organization, the RGC. Within a month the PJC was *the* prisoners' group at Walls [Walla Walla]. One of the first things we did was to break ourselves down into much smaller subcommittees, each of which was assigned the responsibility for monitoring specified aspects of the prison experience. On top of that, we had outside guests coming in to the prison each week to hold joint meetings with us to work with us around various prison-related issues.

Just as prisoners in general became increasingly involved in the activities of the PJC, so too did gay prisoners and some of the other more vulnerable prisoners. They did not become PJC supporters out of a need for protection, but rather because the group took a firm stand not only against racism, but also against all forms of sexism and homophobia. It was an organization that related to the special needs of gay prisoners. It provided hope for constructive change. Before too long the PJC formed yet another subcommittee, with me as its chairperson, which I called Men Against Sexism (MAS). The Resident Government Council (RGC) was

an officially sponsored group; the PJC was an offspring of the RGC and therefore enjoyed some measure of respectability in the eyes of our captors. Similarly, MAS, because of its relationship to the PJC, while certainly not respectable, did possess a degree of legitimacy sufficient to keep the pigs' boot off our necks for long enough for us to stand on our own two feet. I don't think MAS would have survived that initial phase of development had it not been for the protective wing of the Prison Justice Committee.

The PJC did its work well and continued to grow; before too long the group was able to cut all of its ties with the RGC. Now formally sanctioned by the prison administration, and with the AFSC as its primary source of outside support, the PJC became an independent organization. The PJC held its weekly meetings in a room on the second floor of the admissions building. This is where our outside guests would come into the prison and regularly meet with us. At these joint gatherings each subdirector would have to give a report on the status of the work the subcommittee was doing. The subcommittee on visitation, for example, would report on the progress being made in that area, such as problems with the visiting room staff, expanding the visiting area, the conjugal visitation proposal, and so on. I think there were about six different subcommittees, each dealing with issues ranging from racism to legislative action. The MAS subcommittee started out like all the others, but then seemed to quickly develop a life all of its own. MAS membership soon grew to be half the size of the PJC, then grew some more until we slightly outnumbered our parent organization. The difference in growth did not at first create any problems, since we were all marching in more or less the same direction.

MAS started having its own separate meetings in the PJC's office (in addition to the weekly PJC gatherings), and at these smaller meetings we invited people from Seattle's gay community inside to talk with us. Before too long, firm friendships had been struck between the inside and out. At the same time we were busily conducting MAS types of activities, which in large part centered around building a sense of pride and community within the walls. This was accomplished through deeds.

While an occasionally published underground paper at the penitentiary called *The Bomb* usually printed only when someone in the population thought it necessary to make a sort of call-to-arms, we started a monthly newsletter and called it *The Lady Finger* (a very small firecracker). In addition to addressing general issues of sexism and containing news of interest to gays and the more or less advanced social prisoners, the newsletter was a broadside against the scum-bags who were involved in the ongoing rape and the buying and selling of prisoners. I also wrote to and obtained progressive film catalogues through which I was able to obtain documentaries with titles like "Men and Masculinity" and subjects of sexism and anti-Vietnam War themes. The film companies would loan us the films for free; we

merely had to pay for the postage and insurance costs. Getting a room and projector was never a problem, as we'd use the PJC name on our authorization memos.

A typical MAS action during this period would be calculated to strengthen gay unity while at the same time working to isolate and expose those powerful elements within the population who believed it was their god-given right to rob, rape, and otherwise pillage their peers. The process was a slow one. If we stuck our collective neck out too far someone would chop it off. Here is an example of the type of action we'd do back then. There was a nationwide religious organization that primarily ministered to the spiritual needs of gays called the Metropolitan Community Church (MCC). Over a period of time we had managed to obtain authorization from the administration for the MCC to come inside the prison and to hold regular services in the prison's chapel. The Catholic priest had no problem with this, although the Protestant chaplain, who happened to be a right-wing, born-again fundamentalist preacher, stooped to petty acts of sabotage against the MCC minister and his congregation. One Sunday morning a prisoner came running up to me and said, chaplain so-and-so (I forget his name) is going to do a sermon this morning on the evils of homosexuality, specifically targeting the MCC services. I immediately sent runners out to spread the alarm to gays in every cell block; my message was that all MAS members were to attend Protestant services being held later that morning.

We were a pretty sight as about twenty of us quietly sat in the conservative church that morning, waiting for services to begin. I wore shoulder-length blond hair, with lavender stars for earrings. Others wore facial makeup or were in full drag, including colorful dresses. Our quickly-arrived-at consensus, that our mere presence would be enough to restrain the preacher's bigotry, proved to be wrong. He started in on the MCC, and homosexuals in general, preaching what a travesty it was that queers would defile the house of the lord with their so-called religion. That was enough for me. He no more than got a good start when I interrupted his Nazi diatribe with a speech on the value of religious freedom and tolerance. The other MAS members chimed in with their support for what I was saying, while his congregation of protective custody candidates and would-be child molesters remained prudently silent, no doubt intimidated by the sight of so many angry faggots. When the issue was put in a rights context, rather than a religious or moral one, I managed to make the preacher at least pretend to see that his efforts to prevent our chaplain from coming in and conducting services was a denial of our religious freedoms. I made it clear that we would fight hard for that freedom. That confrontation seemed to take much of the wind from his sails, as we had no significant problems with him from then on. After that incident gays seemed to talk around with their heads held a little higher, with a bit more pride than usual.

As a communist, I am of course an atheist. But being a godless commie did not prevent me from defending the rights of MAS members to religious

freedom. And I exercised that right myself by personally attending each and every MCC service that was conducted at Walla Walla. Generally speaking, whether it is workers striking for a fairer wage or peasants struggling for land, you will always find communists defending the rights of the poor and working people. We will be on the side of working-class justice, and exploitation in any form, be it racial, sexual, or economic.

Men Against Sexism continued to build in size and grow in strength. We found safe-cells for exploited people to move into and, while continuing with all of our regular political activities, moved more and more in the direction of what we called crisis intervention. A young pedophile had recently arrived at the prison and was promptly snatched up by the predators. When they were done “using” him, he was sold into a different cell for three hundred dollars. Where before our intervention tended to come after the rape or related incident and would take the form of hand-holding types of support, now we were moving into the area of direct meddling with the behavior of the prison’s toughieoisie (tough-wah-zee). With a combination of bluff and bluster, moral persuasion and dumb luck, we extracted the pedophile from his state of sexual bondage and moved him into one of our safe cells. There was much outrage over this in certain circles. How, they wanted to know, could we possibly justify standing against real convicts over a stinking child molester? We stood on our principles and in the end managed to hold firm against the shifting tides of prisoner opinion. We’d won another round.

But the fight was an ongoing one. For every situation we were able to deal with, there seemed to be two others that were beyond our strength to resolve. There are two types of contradictions in the world, antagonistic and nonantagonistic. Antagonistic contradictions are like the one between us as poor and working people, on the one hand, and the ruling class and its government on the other. This is an antagonistic contradiction that must ultimately be resolved through the process of class struggle and revolution. Nonantagonistic contradictions, on the other hand, are those among the people themselves, and are resolved through nonviolent means such as persuasion and criticism. At least that’s the theory. In practice it did not always happen that way. Our work had, over a period of time, developed to the point of confrontation with some predatory rapists; we were going to have to fight or back off – that narrow set of choices was pretty clear to everyone.

At the next Prison Justice Committee meeting, when MAS gave its weekly progress report, I asked for PJC support in a conflict that MAS was about to have with a group of obstinate prisoners over the rape issue. Some other prisoners had captured and enslaved some kid for sexual purposes. We’d talked and manipulated until we were blue in the face, without any success at all. Violence was the next option. It was my feeling that the more of us who confronted them, the less likely it would be that physical conflict would occur. The PJC would not back our play, saying it was a matter for us to resolve on our own. In retrospect they were probably

right. Blacks must be their own liberators, just as gays must free themselves. We cannot rely on anyone else to do our fighting for us. But at the time we did not see it that way; we were outraged that our parent organization would cut us loose to fend for ourselves in the violent seas that surround us. MAS thereupon quit the PJC. The breakup was a rather acrimonious one. The PJC's demise was almost immediate; within a month they were completely dead. MAS was reduced to a more or less underground group. Our outside support network and inside membership were intact; we merely needed to relocate and reorganize.

The "breezeway" was a term I'd not heard of before my arrival at the Walls. There were a number of these roofed walkways at the penitentiary, only these, unlike those on the streets, had chain-link fencing from top to bottom on each side. Walking from block to the mess hall, for example, required one to traverse one of these open tunnels both ways. It was on these breezeways that much of the violence took place. In fact, there were so many stabbings in one area of the breezeway that it became known as "Blood Alley" by prisoners and guards alike. Because of the overpopulation there were far more men than there were jobs, and even those who did the work were paid just pennies an hour. The breezeway was the place of choice for these unemployed or underpaid hustlers to hang out. They would sell used street clothing, drugs, and even pimp their punks from these areas. The breezeway was, in short, a commercial and social hangout for much of the joint's riffraff. And MAS was no exception. In the absence of an office, we met with each other and conducted the group's day-to-day business from the breezeway.

The entire prison was not dirty and ugly; there was a lovely island of beauty in the form of the Lifer's Park. Set on two sides by huge cellblocks, Seven Wing on one side and Eight Wing on the other, and a breezeway fence in front and the Lifer's clubhouse in the rear, the park was an exclusive island of manicured grass and carefully cultivated flowers. There was always an inmate guard at the gate leading to the park; no one got in unless they were a member or the escorted guest of a member. At the other end of their rectangular park was a large, two-story brick building. This was the Lifer's clubhouse. The Lifer's Club was run by a large black man named Tommy and his two white lieutenants, both of whom were young and tough. Tommy was a well-built ex-boxer who liked having sex with men. He pitched as well as he caught, meaning he would suck or be sucked, fuck or be fucked, although the public image he presented was one of "pitching" only. In the prison culture it is not considered to be homosexual behavior for one to stick his prick into another man's orifice; only the stickee was stigmatized with such labels.

Tommy fancied himself a progressive, on occasion going so far as to let it slip that he considered himself to be another George Jackson. While I knew better than that, I nonetheless tended to overestimate Tommy's level of political development. Tommy had ongoing problems with other elements of the population, like the Chicanos, but these were nothing he could not handle himself, should it ever



come to that. Still, like any leader, he could always use additional strength. Tommy liked having sex with men and wanted more political and military strength. MAS consisted mostly of people who liked doing sex with men; it had some strength, and it needed a home. An implicit agreement was reached. The Lifer's Club soon became the new MAS headquarters.

MAS's eventual takeover of the Lifer's was not a sudden one, nor was it deliberate. We slowly started spending less time on the breezeway and more time in Lifer's Park. Tommy made us feel welcomed. At a subsequent Lifer's meeting it was proposed that MAS, who had been orphaned by the mean ol' PJC, be loaned just a tiny corner of the big Lifer's meeting room, and this only for as long as it took MAS to be recognized by the administration and given a space of its own. With MAS present and Tommy and his goons ramrodding the motion through, the membership was somewhat agreed. We set up an office and from under the protective wing of legitimacy offered by the Lifer's, started inviting our outside guests back into the prison to see us.

Lifer's and MAS members were also able to have sex with outsiders in a specially prepared downstairs room. It was a soundproof room that prisoners once used for reading books for the blind on cassette tapes. But at that point it was empty and unused, with only a mattress tossed on the floor. The members of the Lifer's would take their women friends into the little room; MAS would take their men friends. I was with one guy on the inside, and Robert on the outside.

As officers of the Lifer's were attritioned by release, transfer, or dismissal, they would most often be replaced by MAS members. This was not because of some grand conspiracy or master plan, but simply because we were hard workers who did have the interests of the Lifer's Club at heart. Gradually, the line between the Lifer's and MAS blurred, in our minds as well as in the thinking of the other officers of the Lifer's Club. I was the chairperson of MAS, and Danny Atteberry, Mark La Rue, and Carl Harp were my officers. I was also the treasurer of the Lifer's, and Danny, Mark, and Carl were all on the Lifer's executive board as well. While I had all but lost sight of the distinction between the two groups, others – those on the outside of our gate – had not. MAS had contributed a lot to the Lifer's Club. We implemented a candy sales program in which all prisoners could trade prison script money for our specialized candies. The candy business was highly successful. The Lifer's Club was making money for the first time in a long time. We bought a pool table for the members and made many other improvements to the club. I put an end to Tommy's looting of the club's treasury and made regular and accurate financial reports to the membership. Decisions on what to spend the profits on were democratically arrived at. The Lifer's Club was doing better than at any time in recent history. MAS was doing well too. We'd obtained lots of support from Seattle's gay community and were in the process of pressuring the administration, both directly and indirectly, to recognize MAS and to provide us with a space of our own.



The lifers were being agitated by two dope fiends, who I will continue to call Kevin and Andy, both of whom were in Curtis's rape pack in segregation, and who later stabbed that wanna-be boss rapist. Kevin and Andy agitated for the need to take the club back from the 'niggers and faggots' (my inside lover and many of my friends and MAS members were black). Kevin was going to run for the office of Lifer president, and with Andy helping to stir things up, it did not take me long to see that the Lifer population was going to vote for Kevin. And it was also clear that once elected he would kick MAS out of the Lifer's Club. On the surface all was civil and polite, but beneath the surface the struggle was waging. The day-to-day pressure of this polite-to-your-face-stab-you-in-the-back became too much for Tommy. One night he and his two sidekicks went to the pigs and offered to hand over our shotguns and shells in exchange for a transfer to what was then a kids' joint at Shelton. The administration agreed. They were gone the next morning, as were our guns and ammunition. So there was MAS, weaponless and, by default, the only ones left in the Lifer's Club.

There's an old Kenny Rogers song about gambling that has a line saying "you got to know when to hold 'em, when to fold 'em..." It was time for MAS to fold 'em, to pack our bags, and to move from the flesh comfort of the Lifer's Club and back to the harsh realities of existence on the breezeway. Nearly all the thirty or so MAS members came with me. Danny, Blue, and Mark, most of the leadership, stayed behind. They were not going to run in the face of danger. They were not concerned with whether it was right or wrong for us to be there or whether it was politically right for us to take a step back before advancing again. Mark and Danny were soon driven out of the Lifer's Park at knifepoint, with the loss of much face in the process. Blue quit MAS and became a part of the new Lifer's clique, or at least he was tolerated by them.

MAS went back to seeking sanctioning and its own meeting space. I gave up the position of MAS president, turning the job over to a more "respectable" person, a guy more likely to win the recognition than my friends and I would have been. Buying and selling of weaker prisoners had been stopped, and rape had gone from a traditional test of manhood to an occasional incident. An unarmed MAS would do fine, and most of us would continue to be active in the group's meetings and activities. What was permitted to develop was little more than a social club for gays. MAS started working on inoffensive projects like collecting newspapers for recycling, doing sewing and mending jobs for the population, and generally putting forward a harmless face.

Some thought we should have fought Kevin and Andy over control of the Lifer's Club, but most of MAS's membership consisted of nonlifers who didn't belong there anyway. Besides, I did not want to hurt anyone else. And the bottom line was that we were unarmed and without allies. After the Lifer's experience, the old MAS leadership, Danny, Mark, and I, quietly turned our attention to other

matters, like rearming ourselves and getting out of prison. We also started to do some serious work on a new escape plan.

There was always a high level of tension at the Walls. People were unceremoniously tossed out of their cells, for one reason or another, and no other cells were willing to take them in. There were frequent fights; stabbings took place often; and occasionally these would lead to a death. Often the death could have been avoided had it not been for the incompetence of the prison's medical staff. I'll give you a brief example. On May 23, 1978, a black prisoner named Robert Redwine was stabbed in the side by one or more of his fellows. The stabbing was over nothing of consequence – another senseless act of violence. The victim went to the prison hospital where he was given a cursory examination by a doctor who diagnosed the wounds as “superficial.” The treatment did not include the standard practice of x-rays or probing the depths of the wounds. Redwine was sewn up and then locked in a hospital isolation room and left alone. After a while, the victim started to protest by banging on the solid door at the front of his room and yelling for help from the hospital staff. His demands attracted the attention of one of the hospital porters, an inmate who inquired about the problem. Redwine told the porter that he was in pain and needed to see someone on the medical staff. When the porter delivered this information to the chief nurse, Eva Nelson, he was told to ignore the victim's cries, as he was only “playing for drugs.” The victim's cries went unanswered until hours later he lay dead. He died alone and ignored, from internal bleeding.

Anyway, our collective response to the ongoing prisoner-on-prisoner violence was to re-arm ourselves. Although largely unspoken, there was a clear sense of agreement that if our enemies attacked any one of us, the survivors would launch an immediate counterattack on the aggressors. We still had potentially deadly problems with the new leadership of the Lifer's Club. While we were physically out of the Lifer's, few believed our contradiction between Kevin, Andy, and their henchmen, on the one hand, and us on the other, was even close to being resolved. The gap between us was not measured by the mere yardstick of their tossing us out of the club or the pulling of knives on Mark and Danny, but by the resurgence of rapes, heroin use, murder, drug dealing, and gangsterism that characterized their stewardship of the Lifer's. Not only did they loot the club's treasury, use the place for a heroin shooting gallery, and mercilessly exploit and terrorize the membership, they ultimately left the beautiful Lifer's Park paved over. Thanks to their later escape attempt and getting caught concealing weapons in the park, the administration destroyed the only island of tranquility in the whole sea of violent turmoil.

After many long months of work, including the submission of numerous proposals, revisions of those proposals, pressure from outside supporters, the dogged persistence of MAS workers, and the passage of time, the prison administration finally sanctioned our organization. We'd been on the breezeway for about two or

three months. Now we were official. We were given a meeting space, which just happened to be the air-conditioned offices of some counselors who'd moved to another area of the prison. We thought we were in fat city. MAS was the first openly gay prisoner's organization to be officially recognized by the prison administration. As far as I know, no such group has been so recognized since then. Our organized existence was the result of our determination as a group, the pre-AIDS era in which we existed, the strength of our community support, the good work we'd done on the inside, and, of course, the existence of the then relatively liberal prison administration. What official sanctioning meant to us, in addition to having a nice office to work from, was that we could once again invite our outside guests back into the prison. And bring them in we did. We'd have good meetings in our new office, with lots of singing together, hugs, and general closeness. One thing we did not do, however, is have sex in the office. There was always pressure from the social gays to exploit what we'd gained, using guests to smuggle drugs for us, or to turn tricks for the population in the club's office. We always had to guard against these opportunistic tendencies.

Prison is always a terrible place to be. But within the context, the degree of terribleness can vary considerably from day to day. On some days, particularly when MAS was doing well, the relative level of pain was not too great. At times we were almost happy. At other times the fear and tension were so heavy in the air that we never knew from one hour to the next if we'd continue to live. There would be senseless killings, racial conflicts, and other forms of violence. It was during one of these oppressive periods that Andy raped a young kid in the Lifer's office. Rape had all but stopped taking place, and now here it was again, being rubbed in our faces by our old Lifer foes. I began to wonder if the sickness of this place would ever be changed. We took the rape victim into our cell, as Mark's bunk was still empty. Joe, Danny, and I all tried to help heal him. I had a talk with Andy, who I found lounging about in front of the Lifer's Club. When I confronted him over the rape, he lied to me, saying the incident did not happen. Now what? I'd talked to the kid and knew all the intimate details surrounding the rape; I'd seen the youngster's bruises. He had no motivation to lie. I was still inadequately armed for a showdown with Andy and the growing gang of killer dope fiends who ran the Lifer's.

When tension built up in seg [segregation unit], I would try to aim or direct prisoner anger against their captors and to educate them about the nature of their real enemies. Our cell tried to do the same thing with the whole population. The drug dealing and murders were getting out of hand. MAS would escort older prisoners to and from the inmate store to keep them from being robbed by these narcotic users, but others were victimized. It was going to take more than a finger in the dike to slow this flood of predatory behavior. We organized a prisoner work strike, putting all our effort into making it a success, only to discover that Kevin and Andy had become the administration's first line of defense. They threw a

vested interest in the status quo; their candy scam and other schemes were needed to support their growing heroin addiction. Their narrow self-interests led them to a consistent pattern of opportunism and collaboration with the pigs. Their old pattern of having love-hate relationships with their captors continued from their seg days.

During this time period there was an incident in which the Chicano Club made a move on one of the joint's most attractive gays, a feminine appearing homosexual I'll call Sally. Sally was not a member of MAS and was one of the few gays who had not contributed anything toward the building of the group. The leadership of the Chicanos, who were allied with the Lifer's, said Sally had to leave the man she was living with by choice and move into one of their cells. They would not see reason. I called an emergency MAS meeting. With members assembled in our office, I explained the situation, saying we were going to fight and probably kill people, but did not of course tell them we had a revolver, eighty rounds of ammunition, and three homemade hand grenades. They probably thought we had knives.

Mark, Danny, and I were going to walk into the Chicano Club and start killing people. We had the gun and bombs with us. The members would march to the Chicano Club with us and wait outside while we took care of business on the inside. The membership did not know the true extent of the violence we were about to wage. We did not talk long. As we were getting ready to march, Blue said he wanted to give the Chicanos one more chance. We told him to be quick. He was. Upon his return he told us the situation was resolved. We packed up our weapons and went home. I never asked Blue what he told them. I didn't care. There was a near certainty in my mind that we would kill several people that afternoon. I saw it as necessary to deliver the message that rape and slavery would not be tolerate. I was fully prepared to write that message in the blood of my fellow prisoners. We escaped committing mass murder on that particular day, but there was always tomorrow.

During this event it was necessary to make bombs and to gather materials to make more. We briefly stored some empty pipe casings in Sally's cell. We would later learn that she reported this fact to the pigs. We were prepared to kill and perhaps die for her right not to be forced into sexual slavery, and she rewarded us by turning us in to the administration. This kind of thing happened more than once. Those were the ups and downs of organizing Men Against Sexism. I was subsequently transferred out-of-state for about five years, then served my last ten years at a prison complex outside Monroe, Washington. During that ten-year period there was not a single prisoner-on-prisoner rape at Monroe, nor did I hear of any happening at other facilities within the state. And I kept an ear pretty close to the ground for that sort of thing. I'm sure some rapes happened, but if so it was nothing like the brutality and volume that existed within the state prior to Men Against Sexism.



*Ed Mead in Walla Walla's "Big Red" security unit. From Concrete Mama: Prison Profiles from Walla Walla by Ethan Hoffman & John McCoy*



# QUEERING THE UNDERGROUND

**AN INTERVIEW WITH BO BROWN & ED MEAD**



**Daniel Burton-Rose:** When did you first encounter the idea of gay liberation?

**Bo Brown:** *In a bar!* Where else? [*laughs*] After Stonewall, people from the Gay Liberation Front came to the West Coast. They put up fliers in the bars; they wanted to talk to everybody. Me and some other people I hung out with in the bars were curious so we went over to where they were speaking. We didn't understand a goddamned thing they were saying. They were speaking a foreign language, essentially; they used a lot of political language that isn't spoken by people every day. What they were saying didn't catch on. Then they took it to colleges where it was a little more popular.

**Daniel Burton-Rose:** When did you first start to understand gay oppression as an integral part of capitalism?

**Bo Brown:** Over time. After I paroled from federal prison in 1971, I enrolled in Seattle Central Community College. In a printing class I met a dyke who said, "women ain't chicks" and started explaining sexism and homophobia to me. I went to an International Women's Day event at the University of Washington. There was a workshop about women prisoners. The presenters were so social workery that I got *pissed off* and said: "*You don't know what the fuck you're talking about!*" Instead of being irritated, they drew me out, they got me talkin', then they asked: "Do you want to do this workshop?" I said: "Yeah!" So I did.

At the University of Washington there was a school release program where prisoners from the state penitentiary in Walla Walla lived in a dorm on campus while on parole. The prisoners - all men - had a little speakers' bureau. They visited all the colleges in the area and talked about prison issues. I started going around with them; I became the only woman that they had. Out of that I met all these other women. A prison group developed at the community college, then the women split from the guy who was running it and started our own group which went to the women's prison.

I started reading a variety of political material. There was a Gay Community Center. It seemed like there were thousands of dykes living on Capitol Hill. There was a circle which developed out of the Capitol Hill lesbian community which participated in the mass politics of the time.

**Daniel Burton-Rose:** What about you, Ed?

**Ed Mead:** I'd had a few homosexual experiences in the course of my life, but I always identified as heterosexual. I wobbled back and forth over the spectrum between homosexual and heterosexual. Bo's the one who turned me out. [*laughs*] On a trip down to Oregon together we had a long talk. I got the idea from her that men in the Brigade - and men in the movement in general - needed to be looking to each other to meet their emotional and sexual needs. Only then would we stop draining women's energies so that women could develop their own strengths and abilities.

We started implementing those changes within the Brigade, but where it really came to fruition was at the Washington State Penitentiary at Walla Walla in the development of Men Against Sexism, which confronted prisoner-on-prisoner rape, the buying and selling of prisoners by other prisoners. I identified myself as a *political faggot*: someone who had sexual relationships with men, not necessarily because I lusted after them, but because it was the correct thing to do. At that time, I considered this something which would help my development and help the development of other people in the group. In essence, the idea was that, as a male, you couldn't call yourself anti-sexist unless you had sucked a dick.

I threw myself into the gay community. I wrote articles for *Gay Community News* out of Boston, got my ears pierced and wore lavender star earrings inside the Penitentiary, grew my hair long and didn't take no shit. I was a pistol-packin' faggot. It was a whole new idea of what it meant on the inside to be a faggot. We can be *tough*. You think you can push us around? We'll put an immediate stop to that.

**Daniel Burton-Rose:** To what extent had you two encountered homophobia on the Left before the advent of the Brigade?

**Bo Brown:** The Seattle Liberation Coalition, an umbrella group of Left-oriented organizations in the city which had come out of the anti-war movement, couldn't say the word "lesbian." They could *not* say the word "lesbian," in anything that they said, and any position they took. They could barely say "women."

We were part of the political community, but we were always being disrespected and ignored. We were doing the prison work, we were doing the community work. There was a big housing and welfare rights struggle which lesbians were involved in in Cascade - where a group of them lived because it was cheap. But they never got any respect, they never got acknowledgement. When one

of the Attica Brothers<sup>1</sup> was in town, we had a party for him. I - being the big, bad, butchy thing that I am - got to go in a room with him and the other big bad guys and have a very intense conversation. While I was in that room talkin' about heavy shit, the mother fuckin' movement lawyer was hitting on my girlfriend at the party! He wouldn't listen to her tell him: "*Back off!*"

We started using the basement of the Metropolitan Community Church to have lesbian dances, we were seeing more and more of us. A hundred people would come to these dances: That's a lot!

**Daniel Burton-Rose:** The Weather Underground had a period when they dictated homosexuality to their members, but the Brigade was unique in the underground in being constituted primarily of gay and bisexual people. How did that element of the Brigade affect your practice?

**Bo Brown:** The rumors which we heard about other groups active at the time was that everybody had to fuck everybody, on demand. These poor guys, you know, just couldn't *survive* without getting their rocks off, so they could call up on anybody. We said: "Fuck you, that ain't happenin'!" If you want our support you have to get your own fucking rocks off. [*laughs*]

**Ed Mead:** Women's liberation was seen by a lot of men in that period as free sex. Another common expression of sexism in the movement were organizations in which the big male leaders transmitted the dogma line to the woman sitting at the typewriter. The Brigade wasn't like that.

**Daniel Burton-Rose:** What are the Brigade actions you are most proud of and the ones which you consider the most problematic?

**Ed Mead:** Three acts were especially good. The first one was when the administration at the Washington State Penitentiary in Walla Walla ended the prisoner self-government experiment, prisoners responded by taking over sections of the prison and taking hostages. That rebellion was forcibly repressed, and the leaders were placed in segregation. While in the segregation unit they were brutalized. The type of brutalization was similar to that which occurred several years later, when guards used lead-lined gloves to beat prisoners, when they pulled one prisoner out of his cell and shoved a riot baton up his ass, creating a 5/8" tear.

In response, the Brigade broke into the headquarters of the Washington Department of Corrections and planted a pipebomb there. It went off in the middle

1 "The Attica Brothers" refer to the men who survived the largest prison rebellion in United States history: Lasting from September 9-13, 1971, the revolt in upstate New York was put down in a massacre that left 34 people dead. The Attica Brothers who visited Seattle in the early 1970s were John Hill and Frank "Big Black" Smith.



of the night and did \$125,000 of damage to the building. We issued a communiqué the next day demanding that the brutalization of the segregated prisoners in Walla Walla be stopped. By drawing attention to what was happening in that isolated area of the prison we effectively put an end to it. The correctional administration didn't want that kind of focus on their behavior. We would not have been able to affect that change in the time that it needed to get done in any other way.

A second example also comes from the Washington State Penitentiary, and that is the longest prisoner strike in Washington state history. It was a forty-seven day strike. It was a major story in the newspapers, on the radio, and on television. Everyone was covering this strike, but not once was a prisoner or a former prisoner interviewed, or was there even any suggestion made that the prisoners might have a valid justification for their behavior.

After more than forty days of the strike, the Brigade planted bombs in two Rainier National Banks and issued a communiqué pointing out the interlocking directorate between the banks and the *Seattle Times*. The communiqué went on to say that, in the course of this major news story, not once had a prisoner been interviewed, not once had the media made a pretense of even-handedness in their coverage of the story. The Brigade said: "We're going to keep bombing your banks until you make some show of even-handedness." The reporters didn't want to appear to be the one-sided hacks that they are so they interviewed a prisoner - one in minimum security, I believe - but even that was enough to get the nature of what was happening out.

Within a few days the strike was over. The Director of the Department of Corrections was fired, the Superintendent of the prison was ousted, and the Associate Superintendent of Custody was transferred. And we who called ourselves "The Walla Walla Brothers" - I myself was in prison at this time, not with the Brigade - were released from the segregation unit. We went on to create the Prisoners' Justice Committee and from that: Men Against Sexism.

Thirdly, when the FBI agents were killed at the Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota, there was a massive invasion by U.S. Marshals and FBI agents into both Pine Ridge and the Rosebud Reservations. A lot of brutality took place. The Seattle Left protested this. One of the protests was a march from Seattle to Portland. During the course of that march, in an effort to draw heat off of Pine Ridge and Rosebud and onto ourselves, we bombed the FBI office in the federal courthouse in Tacoma and the Bureau of Indian Affairs in Everett.

There are a number of other actions that I'm particularly pleased with. Another would be the bombing of an electrical transformer in the rich neighborhood of Laurelhurst in support of striking City Light [Seattle's public utility] workers, which was an important struggle going on at that time.

The biggest mistake we made was the Capitol Hill Safeway bombing. We had not planned to bomb the Capitol Hill Safeway store at all. Then someone

named Po from another group was killed while planting a bomb at that Safeway.

We had all participated in a Safeway boycott in support of the United Farm Workers - the grape boycott. We had all written articles about Safeway adulterated foods at inflated prices and about their control of the food chain, from the field to the outlet; so Safeway was always a target. Once Po died we felt it was necessary to finish the job. "Let's finish what Po started." It wasn't our choice; he chose it as a target. We felt compelled to make the lesson clear that when one fails, another will come behind.

We put this operation together quite hurriedly. In the course of this, Bill and Emily Harris and Patricia Hearst - all that was left of the Symbionese Liberation Army - were busted in San Francisco. From that point, emotion drove us more than reason or political consciousness. That was a big mistake.

We planted the bomb inside the store, rather than around the machinery outside, which Po was trying to do. When we called Safeway to evacuate the store the person who picked up the phone thought it was a joke and didn't communicate the fact that there was a bomb there. I called the police but it was too late. We were very lucky not to have killed anybody. We did pelt some people with dog food - the bomb was planted in a bag of it - so there were some injuries.

We criticized ourselves both in writing and in practice. That action was the worst thing that we did.

**Bo Brown:** My two favorites were the one with Walla Walla and the Rainier banks, because of all the connections it made and the way it got those guys out of the hole, and the freeing of John Sherman. After the escape we issued our "International Women's Day" communiqué, which was printed in the daily paper.

It was hard to find targets that were understandable to a lot of people. It was easy to find targets but not easy to find ones which make your point.

**Daniel Burton-Rose:** How did each of you get arrested?

**Ed Mead:** I was arrested in the course of an unsuccessful Brigade bank expropriation.

**Bo Brown:** I was arrested over a year and a half after Ed. We were scouting out a bank, and I wanted to go inside the bank and have a look around because I was the one who had to go in there. We were getting ready to take this whole damn bank, instead of just one teller, so we didn't have to spend all of our time trying to get fucking money. We were going to try to get out of town - to fall back - because it was getting kind of hot.

I went in the bank with a hundred dollar bill to make change. We didn't know that the FBI had begun a super-special GJB unit. We knew they'd doubled the size of them, but we didn't know that they'd quadrupled it, giving them the

personnel to go around and talk to the people who worked in banks and show them pictures.

I left the shopping center and went down to the beach with my dog. I came back up the hill through the parking lot to observe the traffic. I came up the driveway by a hamburger joint which these guys were sitting in. They were on me immediately. I looked in my rear view mirror and saw four guys crammed into a black Ford Fairline, and I knew right away who they were. I started making turns, going around blocks, and they did everything I did. I was trying to work my way back to Highway 99 so I could go north. I was just going to drive to Canada, because we were living very close to where I was, and I wanted to steer them away from the others. I cut through a parking lot which turned out to have been blocked off since I'd been through it last. I had to make a U-turn: I was trying to come out as they were coming in. They threw down on me.

**Daniel Burton-Rose:** Ed, you've mentioned the organizing you did for gay rights in prison. Bo, can you discuss your experiences as a lesbian political prisoner?

**Bo Brown:** I was a very different person than the people in general population. Part of it had to do with age and experience; part of it with being principled. I was very verbal about what I wouldn't do, how I wouldn't treat people. I didn't use people up; I hardly made any enemies. And I helped focus the local struggles.

**Daniel Burton-Rose:** You've remained active doing prison work. Please discuss some of the projects you've been involved in since you were released from prison.

**Bo Brown:** Revolting Lesbians was the first group I became involved with after I got out of prison. They were the leftist lesbian arm of the San Francisco Coalition, which participated in the politics of the 1980s. In all the coalition meetings Revolting Lesbians took the Revolutionary Communist Party to task for their homophobic policies. The RCP stopped working in the coalition and wasn't seen again until they jumped on the Free Mumia bandwagon.

In the year I was involved, we did an educational on women in prison at the Women's Building. We produced a play I'd written called "The Bing," which was attended by a broad portion of the women's community.

**Daniel Burton-Rose:** What are the origins of Out of Control Lesbian Committee to Support Political Prisoners?

**Bo Brown:** In 1986, less than a year after I had gotten out of prison, the federal Bureau of Prisons opened up the High Security Unit in Lexington, Kentucky. The Unit was designed for three women political prisoners. We started a committee to

oppose it; out of that came Out of Control. The lesbians who wanted to continue doing prison work became Out of Control.

At the time no one was doing women's prison work except for Legal Services for Prisoners with Children. We decided that, because there were so many of them, we had to focus on political women prisoners; information on the conditions of women in prison would flow from them. We continue to produce a newsletter, *Out of Time*; we do events in the lesbian and gay community; we send in commissary money to political prisoners. There was no other newsletter on the West Coast which covered women prisoners until California Coalition for Women Prisoners started *The Fire Inside* in the late 1990s.

Amnesty International just produced *Stonewalled: Police Abuse and Misconduct Against Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender People in the U.S.* It documents how the police beat us up and fuck us over continually. Things haven't changed in that arena and they're not gonna change until we make them. We have to pay attention to the prison-industrial complex because it impacts our community.

**Ed Mead:** The struggle for gay liberation can never take a backseat to anything, but always at the forefront must be the class struggle. If power were all of a sudden handed to a gay ruling class in America, the exploitative relationships would continue. There would still be racism, class oppression, women's oppression...the only thing that would change is there would be less homophobia.



# RESOURCES



*CONCRETE MAMA: PRISON PROFILES FROM WALLA WALLA*

- Ethan Hoffman, John McCoy

*CREATING A MOVEMENT WITH TEETH: A DOCUMENTARY HISTORY OF THE GEORGE JACKSON BRIGADE* - Danial Burton-Rose (editor)

*EARFUL OF QUEER INTERVIEW WITH ED MEAD*

<http://earfulofqueer.wordpress.com/2011/04/11/ed-mead-and-men-against-sexism/>

*ED MEAD INTERVIEW ON THE PRISON INDUSTRIAL SYSTEM*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=doE9LMUDU3E>

*THE GENTLEMAN BANK ROBBER: THE LIFE STORY OF RITA BO BROWN*

<http://gentlemanbankrobber.tumblr.com/>

*GEORGE JACKSON BRIGADE INFORMATION PROJECT*

<http://www.gjbip.org/>

*GUERRILLA USA: THE GEORGE JACKSON BRIGADE AND THE ANTICAPITALIST UNDERGROUND OF THE 1970s* - Daniel Burton-Rose

*METROPOLIS: THE GEORGE JACKSON BRIGADE*

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nxZQQ4KuY24?>

*THE NEW ABOLITIONISTS: (NEO)SLAVE NARRATIVES AND CONTEMPORARY PRISON WRITINGS* - Joy James (editor)

*THAT'S REVOLTING!: QUEER STRATEGIES FOR RESISTING ASSIMILATION* - Mattilda Bernstein Sycamore (editor)

# QUEER ANTI-PRISON STRUGGLE



*BENT BARS PROJECT (UK)*

<http://www.bentbarsproject.org/>

*BLACK & PINK*

<http://www.blackandpink.org/>

*FREE NIARA*

<http://freeniara.wordpress.com/>

*GENDER ANARKY*

<http://www.genderanarky.wordpress.com/>

*INDIANA QUEER PRISONER SOLIDARITY*

<http://indianaqps.noblogs.org/>

*PRISONER CORRESPONDENCE PROJECT (CANADA)*

<http://www.prisonercorrespondenceproject.com/>

*PRISON REBELS AGAINST GENDER VIOLENCE*

<http://pragv.noblogs.org/>

*TRANZMISSION PRISON PROJECT*

<https://www.facebook.com/tranzmissionprisonproject>



***“I’ll tell you what, we were  
some tough faggots.”***

**-Ed Mead**

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