Over the centuries our society has progressed to an enlightened, liberated union of the masses.... or has it? Unfortunately industrialization has created a society in which the virtues of honest toil and pride of workmanship are endangered. Most people work at dull, trivial jobs, while many others suffer chronic unemployment. And while it is true that many people enjoy a high material standard of living, and can purchase many gadgets and luxuries, these things have not fulfilled real human and social needs. Even the demand for them is not real, but is artificially created by advertising campaigns and planned obsolescence. Such items do not bring happiness and peace of mind, but only a growing clamour for more and more material possessions.

Meanwhile, the materially less fortunate people are separated from the richer ones by a wider and wider gap and look on in growing envy and anger. The upper and middle income inhabitants of cities have been able to escape to the suburbs, leaving behind the less fortunate who are neither intellectually (i.e. academically) nor psychologically equipped to pursue the financial gains that are necessary to enjoy the benefits of the affluent society.

Having come to the realization that this lifestyle lies beyond their grasp, they are naturally frustrated. This frustration has manifested itself in excessive abuse of drugs and alcohol, which in turn has been the root of much of the crime that leads to an overburdened prison system.
Instead of searching for a realistic solution to the alcohol and other drug related crimes, the government has chosen to throw millions upon millions of dollars into a failing system that serves to warehouse this growing segment of society. Considering the big money generated from taxes on the sale of alcohol and pharmaceutical drugs, how can the government not have a vested interest in keeping these sales going? And add to this the employment and business generated by the placement of new correctional facilities in areas of sagging economic conditions.

I believe that the possible answer to penal reform is to be found in governmental reform. When we can start to address the problems of drug and alcohol abuse in the community without being hampered by the self-interest of government bureaucracies and big business, then we will have an unbiased viewpoint. When people find themselves caught up in the justice system because of crimes attributable to substance abuse, they should be directed by a court sentence and their willing participation to programs that will address their abuse problems and make them more aware of the importance of their role as individuals in the social structure. Once these objectives have been realized we could turn the institutions into the cattle barns for which they are more aptly suited.
Most human societies are heavily steeped in tradition.* In North America tradition plays a very strong part in the concepts of law, order, and justice. Perhaps a good comparison is the earth centred cosmology of Thales and Ptol­
emey which was refuted by Johannes Kepler, Galileo, and Isaac Newton. Yet present day Astrologers make fantastic predictions, backed with complex calculations and elabo­rate charts, based on the antiquated concept of a geocen­tric universe. Like the astrologers, too many of those who dispense justice in Canada seem to cling to archaic thinking out of fear or superstition because they cannot ration­ally conceive of a society without its traditional barbarities. Since imprisonment can be (and frequently is) used as a political device of control and intimidation, the lawmak­ers are induced to adhere tenaciously to the inhumane and outmoded practices of incarcerating alleged criminals. That imprisoning a person convicted of a crime acts as a deter­rent to others is unsubstantiated; that imprisonment reha­bilitates the so-called criminal is highly contentious. If human society hopes to realize the ultimate potential of all its members, then prisons (which are an abhorrence to any civilized and enlightened society) must be abolished.

A large number of people feel quite strongly, how­

*Special credit to Claire Culhane, whose writing in Still Barred From Prison (1985) shows knowledge and insight concerning the problem of prison.
ever, that prisons are necessary, that they protect society
from the threat of dangerous criminals. Strong public
feeling exists for the need to punish the person convicted
of a crime. (It is not difficult to share this feeling when the
atrocities committed by some are expounded and sensa-
tionalized by the news media.) Furthermore, the need for
incarceration seems apparent when, upon release, the ex-
convict immediately returns to a life of crime or goes on a
killing rampage apparently indicating uncontrollable psy-
chotic behaviour. But the imprisonment of these unfortu-
nate souls makes no more sense than locking up all people
who have cancer or diabetes. Until recently the presence
of a person with cancer caused considerable discomfort to
others and many took pains to avoid such afflicted per-
sons. Only a society that is itself sick will seek to punish the
sick person, whether the illness is mental or organic in
nature. "The insane criminal really can no more be con-
sidered a criminal than a child, since he/[she] is mentally
in the same condition as an infant or animal" (Goldman
1969:114). Incarceration for this reason does not even serve
the purpose of social vengeance.

That imprisonment does not work even for the occa-
sional repeat offender is attested to by the alarming growth
of the prison system and the prison population. Prisons do
not rehabilitate: "Men treated like men react like men. Men
treated like animals react like animals" (Martin 1953:275).

An important reason for the prison's inability to re-
habilitate at least some prisoners is that a person trying to
improve her/himself is confronted with constant lethargy
and outright opposition within the unreality of the prison
setting. Even education seems to be more condoned than
encouraged. Conversely, clever ploys and outright intimi-
dation are used to get prisoners involved in a multitude of
silly social groups, just to keep everyone busy and to stifle
the possibility of original thought. Furthermore, a fact that
seems to elude judges and lawyers alike is that in many
instances the accused has suffered such devastating per-
sonal losses by the time the case has come to trial, that any
further punitive action like incarceration is a massive over-
kill on the part of the courts. This creates such an aura of unreality for the prisoner that s/he may indeed require some time to re-assess her/his life and try to make some sense out of it. For many this may never happen. "A nation that builds more prisons and imposes more repressive punishment, usually provokes more criminality" (Bianchi 1985:1). While it is possible that a few strong willed individuals, in spite of the system, may come out of the prison the better for it, the amount of self-discipline and self-motivation required is too much for most.

Since prisons do not protect society or rehabilitate the criminal and cannot be proven to deter others, prisons must be abolished. They serve no useful purpose except for those employed within the prison system, the support industries which build and maintain the prison complex, and the legal establishment (which maintains a steady flow of people going into prison). That prisons help to protect society is wishful thinking because, by conservative estimates, at least twice as many criminals are at large as there are in prisons (Epp 1982:12). These are persons who have not been turned in or apprehended and probably never will be. Furthermore, the money saved by shutting down the prisons would go a long way toward enhancing many social programs; many problems that are presently dealt with under the criminal law could be handled with a great deal less impact on families if left to qualified social workers.
References
The initial motivation for this article occurred on Prison Justice Day, August 10th, 1987. I had given it an ironic title taken from the Carson Commission Report, *Corrections Is A Human Enterprise*. I am no longer satisfied with the title or much that I wrote. I still live confined within the fortress structure of the Prison for Women in Kingston, Ontario, Canada. It remains a limestone monument to social failure. The structure effectively incarcerates women from across the entire country. The concrete walls, cement cells, and barred windows represent a rigidity of social thinking, perpetuated, obstinate blindness to suffering in the interest of serving the economic needs of the Kingston community. I have been told that Kingston ranks as one of the prettiest cities in Canada. To my mind it is a city whose vitality has been fed by the blood and pain of prisoners.

George Jackson in *Soledad Brothers* (1970) says that words written by prisoners for readers on the outside must proceed obliquely; otherwise, those writing them need only to take words covered in blood, spit, and sperm and fling them on paper. These are the dangerous words, the ones padlocked inside. So are the stories of the women contained behind the walls of this prison.

I have told the story slantways. I am editor of the prison magazine because I am a well socialized, middle-class white woman, conditioned and educated to master the placating word. I am also mistress of an idealistic love for one
dead man, two living children, the Atlantic Ocean and a country called Canada. It is not a grandiose social view but it is my own and the anger I feel at having this view of living torn from me is intense.

I grew up in southern Ontario when the city of Cambridge was still called Galt. I walked through the piles of leaves on Main Street to Central School with the lines of a memorized poem playing in my head — “Where we go to school each day, Indian children used to play.” I knew Indians were people of the past. I had collected the artifacts of their lives in the summer fields. Almost forty years later I have found the daughters of these forgotten, wished away Indian people within the walls of this prison. Mostly they have been transported from the Prairie provinces but I have also met Cree Native from northern Ontario as well as une femme du Montagnaise from Sept-Isles. Not only do these women suffer the normal pain and hardship of imprisonment far, far from their homes, they must also endure the upheaval and chaos of adjusting to alien white culture, both its standards and language nuances. Their own culture is far from dead within them; many have been taught in traditional ways. They share these with us. I have attended Pow Wow with them, a celebration of living. They have taught me to bead and stitch moccasins. I have heard their elders speak and have smelled the smoke of burning sweet grass. These women do not relate well to the words of our psychologists nor do they respond well to mind altering drugs. As the pressures of a long period of incarceration mount, they seek relief by slashing their own bodies. They cut their arms and they cut their throats. The walls and floors are covered in their blood. The psychiatrist told me such blood letting was a euphoric relief. I told him it was sick, an abnormal response to abnormal pain. Prison does not sustain the middle-class values of my southern Ontario childhood. It has altered my narrow idealistic view of Canadian society.

I was transported from Nova Scotia to the Prison for Women in October, 1985. I had been convicted of second degree murder following the shooting death of my hus-
band in May of the same year. It was a drunken tragic end to over twenty years of partnership. I was sentenced to life in prison. I had been held in a forensic unit in a mental hospital for months before my trial. After the conviction, I was taken to the Halifax County Correctional Centre and placed in a cell to await transportation east. There are no facilities in the Maritime for women serving Federal sentences. After several weeks in the cells and one final visit with my two daughters, I was driven several hundred miles to Dorchester prison en route to Kingston. I had never been arrested before and the prospect of what lay ahead was terrifying. I arrived at Dorchester only to be informed that there had been an error in my paperwork. I was not scheduled to depart until the following week. I was returned to the cells at Halifax. Some days later I was awakened at about 4:30 a.m., driven again to Dorchester, placed in shackles, a body belt and handcuffs, for the flight to Kingston.

Unlike my Native Sisters, I had a personal case history that included the services of several psychiatrists. I believe my sanity was fragmented and that only forty years of “respectable” behaviour gave me the ability to achieve an acceptable standard of stability. Within myself I was being torn apart by the loss of my best friend, knowing I was responsible for his death. I was in agony with concern and worry for two daughters left behind in the turmoil of unresolved grief and family affairs. I had not been allowed to attend my husband’s funeral; I was allowed only a brief six minute phone call to my daughters. I was very confused and disoriented. The thin veneer of my behaviour cracked when I was moved from a Range to the Wing for “medical reasons” and I had to cope with new bath fixtures!

Shortly after this, it was suggested that I might benefit from a trip to the “treatment centre” across the street at Kingston Penitentiary. I agreed, wondering if some raging maniac was truly lodged within me. I spent the winter of 1986 at KP. The treatment unit was under re-construction and little activity was possible. I was given industrial ear baffles on my first day. These were a curious contrast to the type of verbal therapy I had anticipated. I strongly suspect
that only survivors of concentration camps have ever had to deal with personal tragedy in such bizarre surroundings. Jack-hammers pounded at old concrete walls as new ones were erected making the women’s unit smaller and smaller. I felt I was living out some tortured Poe-like vision.

Once a day I was permitted to go out to a small twenty by fifty foot yard. It was surrounded by a tall Steelco fence...and another taller wire fence mounted with razor edged barbed wire...surrounded by the outer concrete wall of Kingston Penitentiary. Above, guards watched me from the guard towers. I walked through the snow and ice knowing where I was but finding disbelief equally plausible. This was the only refuge from insanity offered by the system to distressed women. It seemed more like a grim tale of Siberia than that of Chatelaine Canada.

I save only a few memories of those months in Kingston Penitentiary. One is of a daily, warm, friendly smile of encouragement from one of the male prisoners who served the breakfast line. I knew no man had come to this place by an easy route, yet this fellow traveler was strong enough to offer hope as well as food. Another memory is as harsh and bitter as the chill that leaked through the old windows of our unit. I had the company of a young woman. She too had been sentenced to life in prison and was rebelling against this circumstance. She had slashed her arms repeatedly and had finally turned to self-starvation in protest. The therapeutic response to her actions was to have the staff remove her clothes, issue summer weight pajamas, and place her under lights in an observation cell. She was held in this condition for ten days. On one occasion the nurse outside her cell remarked, “I wish I was wearing my fur coat.”

I returned to the Prison for Women a little saner and a little wiser. To call a situation that resembles the setting for gothic horror a “treatment centre for women” is the construct of insensitive or sheer brutish planning.

Who is responsible or irresponsible? Nameless, faceless bureaucrats without the imagination to visualize their mothers, wives, or daughters condemned to these condi-
tions? Or are there more sinister overtones? Are convicted women treated with uncaring contempt for contravening the myths of true womanhood, found failing as women because of human error? The gross inequities facing women incarcerated by the Correctional System of Canada are too extreme to be explained by mere bureaucratic oversight.

Largely unknown to the public and virtually ignored by Government, the Prison for Women continues to exist in an outrageously expensive, mind boggling time warp of confusion. It is common to have new arrivals seriously wonder if they have been institutionalized in a mental hospital by mistake and equally common to hear statements such as “I feel like I am on a different planet” or “I feel like Alice after she fell down the rabbit’s arse hole.”

The confusion of prisoners is well matched by that of visiting officials. Somewhere along the path of historic non-development, a stereotypical compensation was offered to female offenders to fill vast discrepancies with a larger male system. By the questionable virtue of these compensations, women are allowed to wear civvies and purchase cosmetics. The result is a hundred perky-looking women awash in cheek blush and eye shadow, going nowhere. However, to the casual eye on the quick tour, we do look fine and immeasurably more presentable than our male counterparts in basic green.

Given our society’s priorities on appearances, it is not too difficult to understand how hard it has been to get any senior administrators to look beneath these superficial trappings to the far deeper problems and confusions that lurk below. However these have become blatantly obvious to many of us inside, and I, along with other sisters, feel it is past time to break through the deplorable compounded confusion that has surrounded women imprisoned in this country.

Most of the confusion comes from the basic nature of the Correctional Services itself. Even now, as it is (once again) under review, Canada’s correctional system is described as segmented, fractionalized, and criticized for lack of co-ordination and consistency. Yet the analysis
behind these observations is directed at only the larger body of institutions, all male. The Prison for Women is less than an aside to the entire reform. This is less amazing when it is recognized that this is not a new instance of neglect but merely a repeat of similar “oversights” throughout the years of so-called prison reform in this country.

The Prison for Women was opened in January 1934. It was constructed from a design used to build Kingston Penitentiary in the 1830’s. This means that women of the 1980’s are incarcerated in circumstances planned when rules of silence were in force and relief of monotony from long cell hours was being reduced by permitting the use of crayons and jigsaw puzzles. Today we prisoners dubiously benefit by attempting to fit these same turn-of-the-century, seven by ten foot cells with an extensive array of allowable personal effects. The result is the harshly archaic two-tiered A range filled with the conflicting needs of some attempting to up-grade their education without desks or bookshelves and others trying to relax in a bedlam of noise created by stereos and/or televisions. Likewise, the fire hazard of library and academic material as well as the quantity of clothing now allowed prisoners was never given serious consideration. We female prisoners are still locked in by the bolting action of a main wheel in addition to individual cell levers that need manual operation from the outside. Truthfully, the thought of fire in this prison is too terrifying to dwell on.

As early as 1938, the Archambault Commission reported on the appalling conditions at the Prison for Women and urged that it should be closed. This has been reiterated by commission after commission report. Indeed, these recommendations have been given serious consideration by many public officials as well as concerned citizens, but not one has been acted upon. Since my arrival in 1985, I have been told that more up-to-date programs and improvements have not been implemented because this prison is closing. This excuse has finally worn too thin. The emperor of the Correctional Service of Canada will have to find new clothes. Judging from the past, awaiting future develop-
ments at the Prison for Women will allow ample time to survey the non-productive results of prison reform.

New terminology does little to change the substance of prison living. A most recent example at this prison was a total re-classification of the prison population during the winter of 1988. Significant attention has been drawn to the fact that female prisoners were designated much higher security risk classifications than their male counterparts. In the past, probably almost half of the population was considered maximum. In response to this unwarranted discrepancy, new security labels were affixed and the majority of the population were re-classified as medium, with almost twenty-five per cent being considered minimum. However, not one living regulation has been modified to allow more prisoners responsibility and institutional freedom. The living reality has not been changed by an inch, but the new figures will look impressive on yet another, another and another sheet of paper. To administrators and to most of you outside reading this, that is what prisons and prisoners are about: facts, figures, numbers, surveys, statistics, and paper. A thousand times more care and attention is given to these details than is ever awarded the individual inside the system.

This article was returned to me for rewriting. There were crisp editorial notes pointing out that as I traced the historical patterns of the main body of the Correctional service, noting the easement of living for male prisoners provided by constructing more moderate living circumstances in the guise of new prisons, I appeared to be supportive of prison reform in that direction. I do not think that the building of more prisons is any step to reform. However, I doubt that most readers will find it credible that since the 1950s a system of Corrections was devised for this entire country without one ounce of planning put into effect for women. Yet that is the truth of the situation. This article is being written from the upper tier of A range, that portion of the Prison for Women that was declared unfit in 1938! As I have stated once before, I am serving a life sentence and the most progression I can look forward
to is a return to a Wing unit, an old army barrack located down three flights of stairs. No man is expected to serve a life sentence with such a total lack of expectations. There are no carrots or sticks for women, just larger, unremitting portions of boredom.

I do not suggest that a parallel system of Corrections be implemented for women. The establishment has rationalized inequality by justifying its position with economics. It is too expensive to provide the same services to women as are provided to men. Most have accepted this explanation and walked on. I do not. I do not believe that the mere handful of women involved in the “cystem” justifies the overwhelming abuse. What does explain the reluctance to face these abuses is the function of paternalistic capitalism at its worst.

The women inside these walls are very real, human, mainly conservative, and often depressingly dependent. Their problems are not bizarre or complicated. In the main, over eighty per cent are addicted to drugs and/or alcohol. Their crimes were committed while under the influence or while obtaining these substances. An equally high percentage are victims of incest, rape, and/or battering. The likelihood of these traumas contributing in part to addiction is very high. In the Fall of 1987, over fifty per cent were below grade nine literacy levels and it is the exceptional few who have marketable work skills beyond the lowest status of employment.

It is not hard nor too complicated to understand. These women need someone to believe in them until they can come to believe in themselves. Addiction is no longer a vague mystery. Much help can be found in both psychological and physiological treatment. Education can be upgraded and job training situations are within development potential, if (the saddest and most futile word in our language) the political will exists. The needs of female prisoners are no different than the needs of many Canadian women. The severity of the particular situation may vary, the lack of family or associate support may vary, but the basic needs are similar. These are not being met in most Canadian communi-
ties for the majority of women and it is most unlikely that the current Government (1988) will make any enlightened move on behalf of female offenders while continuing to remain unmoved by the voices of women still free in society.

Another unspoken truth about prisons in Canada is that they are Big Business. Nowhere is that more evident than in the city of Kingston. The economic welfare of many individuals employed by the Correctional Service as well as that of the merchants of the area is a direct result of employment by prisons. Thousands of marginally trained, relatively uneducated men and women receive high salaries for maintaining the human zoos in this region. To have one prison closed would pose a grave economic threat to the entire population. It is likely that provocative situations would be deliberately created to promote the image of “violent” prisoners and enhance the need for these fortress structures to restrain the violence of those within. A study by Doob and Roberts makes it clear that the Canadian public already perceive violence associated with offenders in this country at over seventy per cent of its real occurrence (Doob and Roberts 1983). It is far easier for those wearing uniforms of law and order to destroy the credibility of prisoners than for us within the confines of the “cystem” to be heard and our reality acknowledged.

The reality within the Prison for Women is that life is hard, sometimes brutal; living barely adequate and programming in all areas marginal. Yet, even these limited facilities are light years ahead of the almost non-existent facilities housing women left in the provincial prisons. Far less provision has been made for meeting their needs. They are frequently housed in a prison within a male institution and denied access to the ordinary facilities such as gym, library, chapel, or small work opportunities (e.g. kitchen or laundry). Their time is passed in tedious, unproductive minutes. As Jessica Mitford says in Kind and Usual Punishment, “The lives of women in prison are not the worst but they are lives of planned, unrelieved inactivity and boredom, a pervasive sense of helplessness and frustration engulfing not only the inmates but their keepers, them-
selves prisoners."

Boredom, blood, tears, futility, that is what prison is all about. How uncanny that this description echoes words often spoken of life in the trenches of war. It seems that the same sort of approach to dealing with problems through violence is applied in both small and large situations. I do not believe our planet can survive another global war and I do not think my country can continue to solve its social problems through building more prisons.

My position is supported by others. I owe a debt of gratitude for the insight being provided by the Church Council on Justice and Corrections. In 1986 this organisation began presenting a new language as a basis for approaching not just reform but the transformation of the justice system. Originally called the language of reconciliation, it has continued to expand and incorporate the broad social thinking of many legal minds. In 1987, in a brief review of the Law reform Commission, the Council has suggested a model of accountability be established:

Accountability means confronting offenders with the harm they have done and providing them with the opportunity to repair the damages and reassure the community. This does not mean that accountability is soft on an offender. It might be harder for the burglar to hear of the long term trauma of the victims than to simply do time (Law Reform Commission Update 1987).

These individuals see that the wasteful process of scapegoating and punishment must stop. It will require a much deeper process of truth telling and calling to account on a personal level. To begin rebuilding, we must stop fooling ourselves about the true nature of human violence. If we can take one first step to implementing alternatives to Prison for women, approach re-integration with communities, and spend funds on community resource development rather than more prison construction, we will pave the way for a better social future. At this moment the Canadian Government is giving serious consideration to
building another prison for women in British Columbia (See The Whig Standard, Friday, December 18, 1987:2). I have been told this 1990 model still contains barred cells. These will stand as monuments to failure in the century ahead. These new cages will be filled with women, sisters and daughters of the future.

The women now behind the walls of the Prison for Women in Kingston have been called “too few to count”. I disagree. Alterations will come about in the system. If the real needs of these few women are honestly addressed, we can be counted upon to make a significant contribution to the larger body of Corrections. I have long loved the potential vigour of this country. It is time to tap that vitality and move beyond patriarchal policies that have sustained these prisons and the limited vision they represent.

References
Introduction
From the prehistoric lad stealing his cave mates' chunk of raw brontosaurus meat and running away wildly to the forest with it, to the twenty year old holding up a bank teller and fleeing with eight hundred dollars on top of his motorcycle, what we call "crime" has remained much the same. What has changed are the names, social importance, and most particularly our ways of dealing with the perpetrator of "wrongful acts". Doing something wrong, against basic moral principles, against the rules, the laws, against our neighbour, is such an intrinsic quality, something so inherent to human beings, that no one is truly shielded against the shame of being reprimanded by his or her parents or against the ignominy of being judged and condemned by a "Court of Law". Those who during the course of their adult life do not find themselves in such circumstances are called "righteous", "honest and law abiding citizens;" the others, "criminals" to their death.

In Canada, this last group is growing in alarming proportions since more than one out of every thousand is in prison on any given day. Unmentioned are the countless others under the all-powerful domination of the National Parole Board or on probation; and uncounted are the tens of thousands who will never again be "free" because of their experience in Canadian prisons: the psychological, social, and economic weight of their "criminal
record”. Prisons, no matter how “beautiful” we make them, no matter how “humane” we would have them, no matter how “rehabilitative” we devise them, will always be horror houses where public vengeance is administered, cruelly and destructively, on persons who are the most vulnerable and defenseless of our society. In the light of logic, common sense and, indeed, humanity, prisons are absolutely unjustifiable, intolerable, and immoral. Building prisons, vindicating and supporting them, working for them, and thriving from them are crimes against humanity.

I am in favour of prison abolition as one who is in favour that the sun should rise on the morrow. Society will continue to destroy itself if the present general ideology about our criminal “justice” and prison system is allowed to remain.

I am from a lower middle-class, French Canadian family of Montreal. Early, I was caught up in the music/drug subculture of the “hippie” movement of the late 1960’s. At age thirteen I smoked my first marijuana cigarette and at sixteen I was already considered a dare-devil when it came to drug experimentation, taking L.S.D., mescaline and injecting methamphetamine. Eventually, I dropped out of school and, as was the custom, went hitch-hiking across Canada, ending up in Vancouver’s hippie haven, Gastown. On July 12, 1975, at age nineteen, I robbed forty dollars from a parking lot attendant and a few minutes later was arrested by the Vancouver City Police. When I arrived at the police station I was taken upstairs into a small room by two policemen, told to undress, and for fifteen minutes underwent a forced questioning while I stood there without a stitch of clothes on, outrageously humiliated, afraid and shivering. I was found guilty of robbery and sentenced to nine months’ imprisonment. My girlfriend was one month pregnant.

I was sent to Oakala prison (in British Columbia) where for three weeks I experienced terror, indignation, and degradation. Sometime later, I was relieved to be transferred to a prison camp called Stove Lake, near Mission, British Columbia. There, I was made to work ten hours a
day, and Saturday mornings, for the benefit of British Columbia’s Provincial Parks and the Ministry of Forestries. I made 35 cents per day and as I took on responsibilities, worked my way up to the maximum pay of $1.25 per day.

The summer had been very hot and dry. A forest fire broke out, and the forty-five or so prisoners were told they would be given seven dollars per hour to help extinguish the blaze. I volunteered, as did all the others. Equipped with spray cans carried on our backs, water pumps, shovels and rakes, we fought the flames for three days, working to the point of exhaustion. I still remember vividly my friend G.P. being flattened to the ground by a water bomb dropped by a huge, low-flying, fire-fighting aircraft. After the inferno, a security rule called for a watch of seven days and nights over the site. Imagining how the money I was making would help my pregnant girl-friend to cope better, I volunteered and spent the best part of the following week in the charred wilderness under pouring rain.

Revolt set in when we all learned that we would not get the promised money but instead the usual 35 cents a day. I was furious and I organised a sit-down strike to protest; all but a few followed me. That morning we were all jammed into trucks and returned to the Lower Mainland Regional Correction Centre. Upon arrival, we were put in metal cages aligned endlessly against the wall of West Gate “A”, and one after the other, we were taken out, walked by three guards in front of all the caged men and forced to disrobe, to bend over and to spread the cheeks of our ass in full view of everyone. I remember a middle-aged Hungarian who didn’t understand the English commands very well and who stayed a good five minutes bent over in front of us, lifting his feet, spreading his arms, until the three irate guards let him go back to his cell, without spreading his cheeks. G.P. told me the man was crying on his way back to his cage. For the first time, prison reality struck me. I was in danger, and no matter what happened there would be nobody to help me.*

*For a month, every morning, one after the other, we paraded from our cage to a single toilet at the end of the tier to empty the nylon bucket we had to defecate in.
I was subsequently returned to the prison camp where I resumed my work. One afternoon, in early November, as I was slashing and burning in preparation for a forestry road that would be laid, the guard nearest to me received a radio message and straight away came to advise me that I had been granted National Parole. All I remember is throwing my hard hat in the air and running the two miles back to the campsite where I waited with agitation to be taken out of the forest to Haney Correctional Centre from where I would be officially released. Minutes seemed like hours, thinking of how I would surprise my girl-friend. Perhaps I would use the back door and appear, unsuspected, with the greatest hug and kiss she had ever had; or perhaps it would be better to phone first when I got in town in order not to cause her to miscarry or something.

I never thought we were so deep in the woods and the road to Haney seemed interminable. Once there, I had to wait some more — anxious, happy, and moist-handed. Finally, they gave me my wrinkled up civilian clothes, my wallet, from which I took a nostalgic look at a photo I.D. card on which I sported my once cherished very long hair. I finished tying my shoes, signed some forms, and headed for the door with a bus ticket to Vancouver in my hands. I didn’t have a foot across the doorway when a rubicund faced guard yelled my name: “Bourque!” I turned around and with one look at the guard’s faces an awful feeling overcame me. I turned white. They said: “A telex just came in. Your parole is revoked, you might have an outstanding charge in Montreal....”

I was back in the prison camp for supper but didn’t eat, instead, shattered, I went to the tool shed and made myself a knife, not knowing exactly why. The rest of that sentence, which I ended up doing completely, turned out to be just a continuum of abuses and humiliations which saw me locked-up an additional thirty days in the “hole”, and placed in a wilderness prison called Mini-Max.

I was released at the end of February 1976. It was raining and cold, and whatever elation I might have felt was negated by bitterness. My son had been born and adopted,
my girl-friend had slashed her wrists in an attempted suicide, and she was being cared for by a couple of sympathetic social workers.

Six months later, I was charged with “trafficking narcotics”. I had directed an undercover agent posing as a hippie, to a friend who sold him $10.00 worth of marijuana. I received the equivalent of a two and a half year sentence after having spent eight months in remand, in Oakala’s South Wing.

I will be thirty-two next May, and so far I have spent the best part of my life in twenty-two prisons and penitentiaries across the country.

Recently, while serving a nine year sentence in Archambault Penitentiary, Ste. Anne des Plaines, Quebec, I could no longer suffer the totally oppressive context and humiliation imposed on us by female guards working in our living quarters so I started to categorically refuse to have my bottom and crotch palpated daily by female employees. Soon, one of them laid a formal charge on me and had me brought to a disciplinary tribunal. The judge sentenced me to five days in the “hole” for refusing to be searched by her.

After being taken to the punitive dissociation area for some of the longest and most painful minutes in my life, I was forced by three employees to undergo a nude search in the presence of the female guard who had me condemned. I refused! They threatened violence. I was screaming in my soul, holding back the tears of fear and shame while they were pressing me to disrobe. I yelled that they didn’t have the right to do that; that it was illegal! They told me they would “rip the clothes off my back.” I became almost hysterical. Finally, she moved from the doorway. I took my clothes off. They made me turn around, bend over, spread the cheeks of my ass, shake my hair, take my partial plate out, and with a grin on his face, the officer in charge told me to get dressed. The metal door slammed! ... I wanted to be dead. A wave of morbidity overcame me in my cement cubicle, and I gave in to it.

Fearing repercussions, my neighbour would not testify so I could not lay criminal charges of mental cruelty
against the guards. So I simply stopped eating altogether. My five days in the “hole” expired, but I refused to come out. After nineteen days of a hunger strike I was taken by force to Donnacaona Penitentiary, near Quebec City, where I was put in “administrative segregation” (i.e. twenty-three hours a day in a cell) because of my protest. That was four months ago, and although I started to eat again after twenty-one days, I am still locked-up in my “concrete uterus”, without any privileges, pending a transfer out west.*

Prison: “From Outside”

Driving along with my family, as a kid, I remember my father pointing out the Old Penitentiary in Laval, and I remember also how abstract a concept it was to imagine the “bad men” who, he was explaining, were locked-up in there. In the course of all these years in prison, and from observing and talking to many a “citizen”, including my own family, I have come to realize more clearly the extent to which conceptual distortions have been conveyed when it comes to prison, prisoners, and even crime.

There are reasons for these gross misconceptions. In order to justify the extravagant sums required to breath life in an insatiable monster such as the Canadian Correctional Service, one must give it a character of necessity and, indeed, urgency. This is mainly achieved by the media’s over zealously in exacerbating public emotions, anger, and fear; they are very successful at telling only one side of the story. This has provoked the injustices and inhumanities of our criminal “justice” system. In the context of the Canadian Society, the six o’clock news will report a most regrettable and dramatic incident like so:

Today, a young bank teller was shot in cold blood in the course of a robbery. When apprehended by the police, it was found that twenty-six year old so and so had just recently been released on

*Subsequently, I addressed a twenty-eight page letter to the Prime Minister of Canada describing some of the horrors, abuses, and degradations that go on daily in prisons across Canada.
parole after having served only four of a seven year sentence for robbery. More news later, now, these messages of interest.

It does not say:

Yesterday, again, a young bank teller was shot in the course of a robbery at the corner of such and such a street. A humanitarian organisation that is now helping the parents of the victim cope with their immense grief and anger has told this media that the apprehended twenty-six year old had, since age seventeen, undergone six years of “legal” physical and psychological torture, degradation and systematic dehumanization at the hands of the penal authorities. Socially and emotionally assassinated so and so had once told the institutional psychiatrist that the scars of cigarette burns on his penis, inflicted by police in a forced questioning pertaining to the denunciation of a major heroin dealer, had caused him to try to commit suicide at least three times while in prison and once at his mother’s house.

More news later, now, this report on the devastating effects of the cruise missile.

I am not trying to minimize the human tragedy that any wrongful act presents, but the creation of a “public enemy” that we must subdue at all cost, as quickly and as decisively as possible, proceeds from the domain of the absurd, and although the vast majority of Canadians endorse the concept with great facility, not to say eagerness, it is nonetheless devoid of any logic and honesty. It is at the base of many social dissensions caused by fear, anger, hatred, and ignorance.

Everyone, every single human being, is a potential “criminal”, and in this country, anyone can be switched from the camp of the “free and righteous” to the camp of the “undesirable enemy,” quite irreversibly, given the state of our prison system and criminal law. Nevertheless, most prisoners and ex-prisoners come from the “lower” strata of society: they are the poor, the undereducated, the socially
(thus politically) disadvantaged, and the contemptible in the light of everyone. Many others come from broken families, alcoholic parents, disadvantaged minorities and have experienced intense socio-psychological backgrounds (e.g. homosexuals and transvestites who found themselves in rejecting contexts). Strangely (not a bit), prison guards and many employees are issued of that same fundamental stock, as are the police. So, on one side you have the incarcerated, oppressed, terrorized poor and disadvantaged; and on the other side the not-so-poor-and-not-so-disadvantaged-anymore incarcerator, oppressor, and terrorizer that takes care of them. The rest of the poor, the plain, the unadorned and “ordinary people,” are neither predator nor prey, yet they are nonetheless part of that same general “group” which is most influenced by the diverse media, sensationalism, and trends; and most easily shifted to and fro and whipped-up against crime and criminals to the point of supporting and advocating the torture, degradation, and destruction of countless human beings, of their own class. And that takes care of them.

Sensational crimes and murders make best-sellers, and they represent a lucrative business. The mass media has commercial interests to look after, and political interests as well. People eat crime up like candies. Television and movies are riddled with it. Crime, punishment, vengeance are powerful trends and it would be hard for the media to “kick against the pricks”. Moreover, it is made to look like our democratically elected government knows what it is doing when it comes to “law and order”, police, and prisons. They build prisons, more and more of them, they devise systems, and construct new rules. They hire tens of thousands of persons to whom they give certain powers, uniforms, weapons, salaries, security, social status, and acceptance, all contributing factors to the strengthening of the legitimization of torture and degradation. Prison guards and employees, citizens, even many prisoners are so engrossed in the induced illusion of a necessity for prison, so completely taken by the hocus-pocus that strives to make them look “not too bad after all”, that they scorn
the very concept of prison abolition. It requires a considerable amount of effort, from anyone’s part, to live in a lie as solidly implanted and as cleverly disguised as the “free and civilized Canadian society” and not be blinded by the glare.

It all amounts to a systematic desensitization of the “general public” and particularly of prison personnel, to whom any torture, degradation, violence, and oppression becomes not only legitimate but natural. In fact, when a prisoner shows signs of “rehabilitation” to the penal authorities or parole board, these signs are usually indicative of a complete engrossment in the “system;” an acceptance of her/his outrageous sentence, acceptance of all the injustices, tortures and degradations that s/he has been subjected to upon arrest, during the legal procedures and especially while incarcerated. A complete submission to fascism. Any prison employee becomes a mercenary because he or s/he has to comply with certain directions in order to get her/his recompense. And notwithstanding their own obvious propensity for sadism, they must undertake certain actions and display attitudes that are all meant to debase, oppress, and subdue the prisoners. They are taught certain “facts” by the prison makers which automatically justifies their being “right” and the prisoners being “wrong”; these beliefs, issued of brainwashing sessions, criminological theories, media, and force of habit, are being strengthened daily by the attitude and behaviour that every inmate will display from time to time under the pain of torture, fear, and humiliation.

Prison, and what prisoners actually undergo inside of them, is a major factor in causing crime. Nevertheless, this fact does not pose a threat to the ruling class the prison serves most. On the contrary, “mutants”, vomited back to their alma mater (minus the family link) are much more liable to rob and/or kill a corner store owner than to commit a deliberate terrorist act aimed directly against those who have warranted their torture and debasement.

Today, even kids are taught to embrace the concept of punishment. Routinely, college and university students of criminology classes and others are paraded through
brightly painted "institutions", shown pleasant looking cafeterias, sports equipment, houses for family visits, landscaped grounds, and get to meet "selected inmates" and members of the staff in "controlled" situations and settings where the ignominious and revolting fact that they are amidst a human zoo becomes undiscerned in the gay, but diffident chit-chat.

**Prison: "From the inside"**

While the degradation and alienation is indubitable, and beyond the "off-hand" deprivation such as the loss of liberty, security, privacy, autonomy, gratifying sexual relations, freedom of speech and association (and one must bare in mind that these are but the *foundations* in which every prisoner is set), countless daily abuses and illegalities administered by individuals with nearly unlimited, justified power over prisoners, are more or less endured by a recourseless inmate population. Any safeguard to protect Canadian prisoners from abuses and psychological tortures is absolutely futile since any Law, Rule, Directive, or Standing Order can be and are broken by invoking the preservation of the "Good Order of the Institution" and/or by any employee that wants to "take it out" on the inmates since it is common knowledge, and fact, that inmates have no means of defending themselves and that they do not pose any serious legal threat to prison staff. On the other hand, at the first threat of physical retaliation, the inmate is quickly and vehemently subjected to restraint and legal violence.

The "improvements" brought to the living conditions of Canadian prison in the past decades, even education, have all been efforts directed toward a more complete justification of the "system" in the public eye, for obvious political reasons, rather than an actual bettering of the system (if that is at all possible!). Some modern prisons, with "comfortable" cells, better meals, plants in hallways, the possibility of buying one's own television, radio, or trade programs have not taken away any of the violence, humiliations, fear and alienation inherent to Canadian jail houses. Quite the opposite, they have engulfed the more undiscern-
cerning prisoners in an added state of confusion where their hurts and pains are less readily associated with their immediate environment, leading to unsurpassed senses of guilt and self-hatred. Moreover, all these subterfuges have added to the boldness and self-justification of employees to a point where even institutional psychologists (absolutely unprepared to work in prison) find inmates’ outrage to be just another indication of prisoners’ “immaturity” and “criminal nature”, thus adding a “pathological” stigma to an already degraded and immensely hurt person.

The implementation of “family visits privileges” — where an inmate may be allowed up to seventy-two hours of privacy with wife and/or family, in a house or mobile home especially devised for that purpose on the prison grounds — has proven itself to be the utmost tool of degradation, humiliation, and manipulation; sexual gratification is now being offered as a reward for compliance and submission! An inmate that did not have six months or more “recognized relationship” with a woman prior to his arrest will most likely spend the next five, ten, or fifteen years settling for stories and masturbation. Moreover, those who are “eligible” for such programs find themselves in a position where they feel they are begging to be permitted to have sex with their wife or girl-friend to a classification officer who is often a young woman, or to a special board formed of half a dozen prison officials who will bring-up past “offenses” and long forgotten “disciplinary court” dealings in order to aggravate and “test” the inmate who will bite his tongue and swallow as much double-talk and indignation as he can in order to be able to caress breasts he has only imagined for many months. Not withstanding the short moments he may get to spend with his loved ones a couple of times a year, and depending on the acuteness of his moral discernment, the inmate will invariably feel some sense of disgust and self-betrayal for not having expressed his true sentiments and for having let himself be disgustingly manipulated and degraded in order to be able to fulfill one of his strongest physical and emotional needs.

The same machination takes place when a prisoner is
in front of the “parole board,” where individuals who have “carte-blanche” control over her/his life make decisions and probe the inmate from files and reports written about her/him, all kinds of reports written by employees over the years that the inmate knows nothing about and that s/he is not allowed to see, whether or not s/he applies under the “Privacy Act”. Some of these reports are written by psychologists after new and unaccustomed prisoners have been duped into seeing them, not knowing that everything that transpires from the conversations, even the most intimate details, becomes public, available to all except to her/himself.

With the accepted belief that any torture imposed on a prisoner is justifiable by the “fact” that he’s a criminal and an undesirable entity of the human race, the Canadian government has fully integrated the living quarters of male inmates with female guards and employees — pushing to new heights the humiliation, degradation, and torture of these men. Already, hundreds of inmates have been forced to undergo illegal nude searches in the presence of female employees and many that have refused have seen their clothes taken off their backs by force in the presence of young women they have to live with for years. The few that have managed to get the guards prosecuted in Federal Court have seen them get not much more than a reprimand; meanwhile these practices continue everywhere, particularly in medium security institutions. In many prisons, male inmates are forced to undergo medical interviews and examinations in the presence of female guards, while female prisoners are specifically protected against the very presence of male staff in their living quarters. In male prisons, suicidal inmates are thrown naked in bare cells, without any clothes or blankets to cover themselves, with only a hole in the middle of the floor to defecate in, while they are being watched by women guards on a closed-circuit television screen and through the window of the cell door; moreover, ordinary inmates are often thrown naked in these cells as a means of punishment for offenses involving the guards directly. Sexually deprived inmates are
forced to have their body completely frisked, daily, by female employees; they are looked at in their cells by the same, whether they are defecating, masturbating, or washing themselves. In many prisons, male inmates are forced to shower in full view of female employees, more so in punitive dissociation areas and in penitentiaries considered more humane and of lesser security. Many live with the daily fear of being violently humiliated.

This cross gender guarding of male prisoners has given rise to an excruciating impulse of violence against women and to “rape oriented” patterns of thinking. It has given rise to mutations in inmates’ sexual and psycho-sexual behaviors, to countless cases of exhibitionism and voyeurism because a human mind has a tendency to transform into “pleasure” pains and hurts that are unquenchable. Countless frustrations and humiliations of a sexual nature are added on the already unbearable yoke that inmate must endure, specifically because of the presence of women guards.

Abolition
If we are to think of abolition in any serious way, and if we are to devise “humane” ways of dealing with the phenomenon we call crime, we must have the courage to face some sobering facts. An incalculable number of Canadian citizens have forever lost their human wholeness and social integrity because of their condemnation to prison. And countless others are being systematically degraded and rendered insane by the same means. There is no place for them in this society, as it is, because it has been conceived for other kinds of beings, not “mutants”; these people have not much left to lose, and many have come to realize this fact. Moreover, they are jam-packed and supercharged with so much hatred and pain that a scream as big as the whole universe would not relieve them of it. More than ever, they will continue to steal, rob, rape, and kill, with, in their soul and mind, all the justification in the whole world needed to do so; they will grab all they can, while they can, because soon they will either commit suicide, be killed by the po-
lice, or brought back to prison — the latter being an indispen-
sable and deliberate contrivance on the part of the “au-
thorities” to perpetuate and expand a system that is outra-
geously immoral and inhumane. If we are to gradually
abolish prison, how will we care for these people whose
sense of security and freedom is forever lost with the ac-
quired knowledge that anything can be done to them,
anywhere, at any moment and for any reason? What will
we do with the tens of thousands of socially, psychologi-
cally, and emotionally mutilated ex-prisoners when ware-
houses are no longer there to store them? Can we possibly
re-integrate those who have been systematically alienated
from society and humanity?

How about the tens of thousands of prison employ-
ees, guards and jailers? Can we help them readjust when it
is common knowledge that they are as “bad”, if not worse,
than the “criminals”? What will their “careers” and lives
amount to? Will they ever be able to face the music? How
will Canadians cope with our image of ourselves as a na-
tion of civilized people?

Prisons are not being “bettered”, they are being
“worsened”. With the most dangerous belief that we are
“improving” our prison system and lessening the trauma
caus ed to prisoners, we are headed for an increasingly
steeper precipice and we are giving prison officials, em-
ployees, and guards more leeway and justification to go on
degrading and abusing human beings, to the detriment of
all Canadian citizens and, indeed, humanity.

How will we go about implementing whatever solu-
tions abolitionists are proposing? I suggest this: First, we
must at all cost begin a systematic denunciation of the
Canadian prison; we must by all means expose the futility
and cruelty of it along with the lies and hypocrisy that are
at the base of our criminal and penal system. We must at
once begin serious and unbiased empirical studies on the
social and psychological effects of incarceration in Canada
and we must immediately find ways of stopping the psycho-
logical atrocities, tortures, abuses, and illegalities that pris-
oners are subjected to daily.
Second, we must at all cost “de-Hollywoodize” and “depoliticize” crime and gradually transfer the “responsibility” where it belongs, in the social arena; we must start to contemplate and accept the fact that we are all guilty and that by putting all the blame on one person and destroying that same person we are going against the most fundamental rules of logic: we are destroying ourselves.

Third, we must be honest and take courage, and face the inescapable truth that social dissensions, crimes, prisons, and such are nothing but a physical manifestation of a metaphysical reality, i.e., the prevailing and innermost feelings and thoughts in the heart of us all. What we observe, everywhere and anywhere in this country, on the political and social landscape, is us; we must change us, if we long to see real changes appear and stay.

Afterward

Some years ago I became an artist, a painter; and one night, as I often did, I was laying on my bed, in my cell, sounding my mind and soul for inspiration. Suddenly, in the stillness of the dark, an image came to me that sent shivers through my body: I saw an endless and beautiful landscape, green grass, flowers and trees, and a radiant sunshine flooding it all; and everywhere, like pebbles on a lawn, on top of hills and in valleys, beside the streams and on mountain flanks were prisons, thousands of large, red-bricked buildings with bars in the windows. And as far as the eye could look there was no one to be seen. I never painted that, but the image is as vivid today as it was then.
To begin the discussion on prison abolition there are a number of issues which need to be evaluated. The idea of prison abolition can be divided into two views. The first, is that all prisons should be abolished and we must find alternative ways for dealing with those who are criminalized. The second view is that although prisons may be a necessary evil, our society imprisons far too many people. There should be a halt to all prison construction and a drastic reduction in the number of prisons we already have.

The first view, absolute or total abolition, is somewhat obscure and in my opinion not only unachievable but unrealistic. I believe this position has frightened many people away from the abolition movement. The unfortunate reality that there will always be a need to isolate from society the most violent and dangerous. Their percentage, however, is far less than the number of people presently incarcerated. In Canada we have one of the lowest crime rates per capita yet one of the highest incarceration rates in the western world. Canadians are under the illusion that crime is rampant in our cities, an unfortunate side-effect of being bombarded constantly by the American news media and television industry in general, which seems to have a fixation with crime stories.

Those who call for total abolition are somehow trapped in the belief that mankind can and will achieve a utopian society in which men and women will look upon
all their neighbours as brothers and sisters. They look to past cultures and indeed to some cultures which did not have prisons and use these as illustrations for how things would be. They cite as fact that prisons for much of the western world are a phenomena that developed in the seventeenth century, and that somehow we can find a way back to the mythical Garden of Eden where prisons will be unnecessary. It is, however, an unfortunate reality that men and women being innately aggressive toward their own kind will not venture down that road. The strong will always prey on the weak, even though this may be obscured under a veil of empathy.

The other abolitionist view includes the belief that there are far too many prisons and that they have develop­ed into a spider web of despair and injustice, while becoming a financial burden on the government. All correc­tional facilities should be abolished with the exception of a very limited number which would be reserved for those who have been convicted of violent offenses. It is an unfortune­ate reality that there have been (and undoubtedly will always be) people who commit violent offenses and pris­ons are a necessary evil for dealing with them. The num­ber, however, is much less than one might imagine and would include approximately three per cent of the prison population at any given time. At present, over sixty institutions at various levels of security exist for federal inmates alone. These coupled with the number of existing provin­cial institutions, clarifies the reality of the mushrooming prison system and of the financial drain required to main­tain it.

If we want to start to understand how we can begin to dismantle this monstrosity, we must first ask what has led to its creation. I would suggest that the main contributing factor was not, as many would presume, a dramatic increase in crime. What led to the great expansion of the system were those groups of concerned individuals that have worked to try and reform the system. Consider, for example, that most of the expansion of the system took place after the 1950’s. What has happened along side of this expan­
sion has been the public awareness that changes must and should be made within the system. There have been calls for treatment centres, special institutions for specific groups of offenders, and community residential centres to help prisoners reintegrate into normal society. This did not cause a reduction in the number of prisoners, rather it simply led to a dramatic increase in cell space, followed by a need to fill them. One only has to look to the last Canadian federal election and consider Prime Minister Mulroney’s campaign promise to his constituents, offering them prosperity by putting a prison in their riding.

Many of the agents for reform have willingly or not become agents for control. Consider, for example, Operation Springboard in Ontario. Without trying to single out any one organisation, Operation Springboard was initially designed to provide transportation for prisoners’ families to and from prisons. Over the years it has expanded to include a wide range of facilities and services to help prisoners and their families. They have recently started to run halfway houses for prisoners. The idea of halfway houses for some prisoners has some merit, however, it is my belief that the present use of these facilities has strayed from the original concept.

These halfway houses do not take the prisoner away from the prison, but they have brought the prison into the community. The Correctional Services of Canada has just recently provided Operation Springboard with a multi-million dollar contract to run their halfway houses and provide parole supervision for prisoners released to them. Halfway houses are not necessary for every prisoner, but there is a frightful increase in the number of prisoners that must first go through them. This is how Correctional Services farms out their products; the prison industry is spinning its web by moving more and more into the community.

If concerned groups would truly like to help prisoners, they should not call for programs that lead to the expansion of the system. The system is lying in wait to devour them, to suck them into working for it, usually disguised as an alternative to Correctional Services, but in
reality one and the same program of control.

So what is the answer; how do we begin to dismantle this spider web? Actually the answer is not that difficult. The first step is to stop sending so many of our citizens to jail. We do this in the belief that we can prevent crime. I am afraid this just is not the case, you can only prevent crime in the community, before it has been committed. Prisons usually only serve as a breeding ground for contempt, bitterness, and hate, to which the recidivism rate will attest. Prisons are not designed or operated for crime prevention.

We send far too many people to prison in Canada. The number of persons sent to prison for crimes other than violence is staggering, and in effect immoral. Many of our young offenders have followed an all too familiar path. They drop out of school into the unemployment scene only to scramble for a way to find a legitimate means of support. The result is, they far too often stumble into the judicial system and end up in the cyclical world of the prison. It appears that our judicial system has somehow forgotten that we are all equal under the law. It is painfully obvious that this is not the case. Many groups seem almost targeted by the inequality of the structure of our social institutions and at first contact with the judicial system get caught up in its web. This happens to a disproportionate number of people of minority groups. We must find ways to reverse this trend and have our young graduates from school move into the workforce, rather than drop into a prison cell.

We are going to have to reassess our judicial system and look for viable alternatives to prison. We do not need to send people to prison for property crimes. Community work programs are a far better approach to having offenders repay their debt rather than filing them away in some desolate time chamber. There is no gain, only a loss and one that cannot be recouped. We have to help those who find themselves trapped in a circle of life that leads to conflict with our judicial system. We are going to have to quit sending our young to jail, because, for example, they
turn to drugs to escape the pain caused by the leg hold trap our society has sprung on them.

If we stop sending so many of our people to jail it would not be necessary to maintain so many cells. We could, as Claire Culhane (1980) has pointed out, use prisons for about three per cent of the number of prisoners we presently confine. Think for a minute. Do we really need all the prison cells we have in Canada? Is that what we as a nation want to be recognized for: one of the lowest crime rates yet one of the highest incarceration rates of any western country? Prison abolition is not all that elusive. We need only to quit filling up the prisons we already have and begin to destroy them, not build them.

Reference
The issue of abolishing prisons in Canada is very complex. Those who support the idea must be thoroughly committed to this cause. These abolitionists are fighting against a very powerful system, a system which survives by oppressing those within the prison and those outside it who seek to change the plight of prisoners. The prison system is comprised of several bureaucratic microcosms: the Correctional Services of Canada and other governmental agencies, the courts, the police, and most importantly the guards' union. These agencies combined have the ability to manipulate every facet of our society. They control public opinion by baiting the press with lies, and consequently affect elections, beliefs and prejudices. They are not about to let their power structure erode. Any organisation which opposes them jeopardizes itself. The prison system has the power to do most anything imaginable and not be held accountable for its actions. This power is unfathomable to the average citizen as s/he is kept ignorant of its existence. The only people who truly have a grasp on what this power is and where it originates are the men and women in this country who are incarcerated in prisons.

In prison a person learns just what it means to be oppressed, and how far-reaching that oppression is. Abolitionists have not been successful to date because they do not understand fully what it is they must do to achieve their goals. The abolitionists are trying to change things at the
level of the incarcerated when the solution lies in eroding the power of the entire system. This misdirection is another example of the systems power. The system reacts enough at the prison level to make the abolitionists feel that they are accomplishing something when, in fact, they are not. The abolitionists are not going to be successful until such time as they change their direction of attack.

Abolitionists have been proceeding in the direction of prison reform. Activists such as Claire Culhane (1980) have worked to improve conditions within the prisons, attacking issues such as solitary confinement and living conditions. The hope of the activists is that by raising the awareness of the general public concerning prison conditions, the public will become outraged and demand abolition or at least a prison program which rehabilitates prisoners. The activists want the public to realize that the people who are now in prison will one day be on the street again, and that the best interest of society is served by ensuring that “ex-cons” have been treated fairly while incarcerated: society will suffer if these “ex-cons” are bitter when they are released.

Abolitionists fail to see that the work they are doing in prison reform may be doing more harm to their cause than good. By insisting on change at the level of prison reform they are shifting the focus of attention from the system to the individual prison. This practice allows the system to act behind the scenes: to make decisions without interference. Though the work the abolitionists are doing has a positive effect on the daily lives of the prisoners, the system is becoming more powerful every day. The abolitionists are increasing public awareness but not on the real issue. The end result is that if the public ever does get involved *en masse*, they will work to better the daily living conditions of the prisoner instead of working to abolish the system.

It is safe to say that the abolitionist has set the focus on the wrong subject. The real problem which faces abolitionists is that the hierarchy in Ottawa has no control over its own institutions. If abolition is to occur, the power of
the subordinates in the system will have to be removed. One example of subordinate power is the guards' union which gets more powerful each time a new penitentiary opens and the union membership increases by absorbing the new recruits. The union also becomes more powerful with each riot it causes since it can use prison riots as a bargaining tool to increase membership or salaries. Guards are dependent upon the system for their livelihood. Because they are right in the thick of the action, they can manipulate events in their favour. The guards' union and its activities are not scrutinised by any government department and therefore it polices its own activities. This is a great deal of authority which the union exploits at every opportunity. Abolition of prisons will never occur until the power of the guards' union is eroded.

The union is only one example of a bargaining unit which requires the survival of the prison system. Other jobs are created by the prison system: clerical staff, building contractors, suppliers, administrators, and employees working in prison industries and services. These groups would fight abolition just to save their jobs.

The entire system is a business now, more interested in jobs and money than rehabilitation or abolition. The power of this system is in its ability to provide secure employment. Any attempt to change the system must take place at the source of the power. The groups who hold this power must be exposed for what they really are: a violent, corrupt, and greedy group of oppressors who are making a living by degrading and oppressing prisoners.

Until such time as power is taken away from the oppressors, the injustices occurring behind prison walls will continue. Men and women will continue to leave prisons with bitter feelings for the diseased society which allowed them to suffer. Abolition can only occur when the power of the oppressor is in the hands of the oppressed. The activists working to better prison conditions are only succeeding in giving the system more to oppress.
References
A number of years ago I was asked by a colleague active in prison volunteer work to write to a prisoner who was in the "hole" in a Canadian penitentiary. She thought I might help, at least by providing moral support for the duration of his "closed" confinement. After the exchange of a number of letters I noted a confusion on the part of the prisoner. What exactly was a criminologist — forensic scientists, an investigator of the so-called "criminal-mind", or possibly a Sherlock Holmes type who worked with the police? As one of Canada’s first members of the new school of critical criminologists I appreciated his confusion. He was touching on a question which permeates our work: what is the focus and subject matter of radical criminology? This confusion was compounded by our different perspectives. His was a personally reactive damning of the prison, while mine was a more distanced, theorized condemnation of the whole system of criminal-justice industry. In our correspondence over the next year we discussed these issues at length and we grew in our understanding of the phenomenon of imprisonment. After many years of working within criminology, I had come close to concluding that there was little left for me to learn. The self-discovery that this man, and prisoners generally, still had much they could teach me was intellectually and academically liberating.

My response was to reconsider the development of radical criminology. In “Whose Side Are We On?”, How-
ard Becker (1967) made a strong argument for taking the part of the criminalized/prisoner, including taking what s/he had to say seriously and following through on it. Becker, Edwin Lemert, Erving Goffman, and David Matza were leading social reaction theorists whose work in the 1960's established a new liberal tradition of critique. They argued that the “pathology model” of the rehabilitators, which defined the criminalized as “sick” and in need of treatment not punishment (a slight of the hand most professionally turned), served to deny their voice. Matza advanced Becker’s position by arguing the need to take “seriously” the definitions of reality of the criminalized and imprisoned and to place them at the centre of our analysis. During the 1960’s and early 1970’s, radical psychiatrists, social psychologists, sociologists and anthropologists advanced similar arguments for giving authenticity to the voice and meanings of their human subjects. The development of this liberal line of critique is exemplified by William Ryan. In Blaming The Victim (1976) he argued that it was primarily the poor, powerless and disenfranchised, racial and ethnic minorities, who were the focus of social control and the fodder of the rapidly expanding agencies of social control in North American societies.

The publication of The New Criminology (1973) seemed to signal a new departure. The authors thoroughly trashed academic criminology as theoretically and methodologically impoverished, incapable of fulfilling its own “scientific” requirements, and therefore amounting to nothing more than control ideology. They argued for the creation of a new marxist criminology which would oppose the existing social order. In California the Berkeley Center for Research On Criminal Justice created an American brand of radical criminology that actively studied the “enemy”.¹

¹In 1973 this group created the journal Crime and Social Justice which remains the major publication for critical/radical criminology. They have published numerous books: including The Iron Fist and The Velvet Glove (1975), an analysis of policing in the United States, and Punishment and Penal Discipline (1980), a collection of articles on the uses of imprisonment and other forms of social discipline edited by T. Platt and P. Tagaki.
This wave of critique spread to Canada and parts of Europe, and was for a short time highly informed and advanced by the emerging radical consciousness of prisoners themselves. In most instances this "radical" criminology was the product of writers who had been working directly with prisoners. For example, the writings of George Jackson (1970; 1972) and Angela Davis (1971) were a strong force in the radical movements of American society in the early 1970's, and had a major influence on the creation of a radical criminology there.²

This fertile relationship between prisoners and politicized academics led to attempts to create prisoners' unions in Britain, Europe, and North America.³ However, as the repression of radical politics grew in these societies, the prison ceased to be a major focus of critical political attention, and outside support for prisoners' rights and unions also waned. After the marriage of inside and outside radicals broke down, this burst of light illuminating the destructive horror of imprisonment was explained away as the product of the penetration of the penitentiary by outside political activists. For example, it was claimed that the political consciousness and radicalization of prisoners in the United States had been the product of the influx into American prisons of the Vietnam war draft resisters and political opponents. And the voices of prisoners once again receded.

By the 1980's, the analysis of the "new criminologists" concentrated on the capitalist state. Criminal justice institutions are portrayed as a principal means of dominating the working class and disciplining them to labour. Through their analysis of the creation of the capitalist state it was

---

²The early work of the Berkeley Center was greatly influenced by California prisoners' struggles. The first issue of Crime and Social Justice included numerous contributions from prisoners and dealt directly with prison conditions.

³The most complete analysis of these movements is Mike Fitzgerald's Prisoners in Revolt (1977). John Irwin (1980) Prison in Turmoil deals with the prisoners' union movement in California. Thomas Mathiesen's The Politics of Abolition (1974) is the most important book on the Scandinavian unions and on strategies for prison abolition.
argued that criminal-justice institutions were constructed to forward class discipline and as a means of reproducing and legitimating the emerging capitalist social order and class divisions (e.g. see Gaucher 1982; Ignatieff 1978; T. Platt and P. Tagaki 1980). This led (inadvertently?) to prisoners once again being relegated to the status of the "lumpenproletariat" — the dregs of capitalist society and its aggressively competitive system of social relations. Ian Taylor and Jock Young, dominant figures and intellectual leaders of the new criminology, have argued that working class people are the major victims of street crime and therefore we have to realistically deal with the problem of the "lumpen" fraction of the working class who prey on their fellow class members. Though this is in part a response to the "new realism" of an increasingly successful reactionary right-wing criminology, in essence their arguments differ little from those of traditional law and order rhetoric (See Taylor 1981; Lea and Young 1984). Today the voice of the criminalized and incarcerated in Canada is confined to sensationalized commercial work.

The use of ethnographic work in qualitative social science is well established. The necessity of taking into account the sense and rationale of all actors within the analysed social situation or cultural realm has become an accepted part of contemporary anthropology and sociology. However, in the current analysis of prisons, this component is increasingly absent. This void is important because a reliance on the perceptions and interpretations of prisoners serves to inform and vitalize academic analysts. The originators and proponents of the new schools of critical criminology seem to have forgotten the role the criminalized and imprisoned have played in the development of their own thinking and the critical positions they have established. The major analysts and spokespersons of this critical tradition in criminology are all indebted to prisoners. As noted earlier, in America, the initiating work of Howard Becker and other interactionists was informed by their work in carceral institutions, and the Berkeley group was highly influenced and directed by the prison revolu-
tionaries of California. In England, the work of the “new criminologists” was formed and informed by their interaction with prisoners in the maximum security wing of Durham prison. In Scandinavia, major theorists such as Thomas Mathiesen, formulated their work on the basis of their involvement with prisoners’ struggles, and in France, Michel Foucault’s involvement clearly served as an inspiration for his highly innovative analysis (1977). The prison abolition movement was also the product of these times and these interactions; Mathiesen’s *The Politics of Abolition* still serves as the theoretical bedrock of the movement.

So why rehash this history of criminology? Are our prisons any better because of these developments? Have there been any “real” changes or has the expansionary dynamic of the social control apparatus been slowed? Certainly not. Our penitentiary system continues to grow at an alarming rate, and the violence and brutality that characterize them have kept pace. Yet that short period of time in the 1960’s and early 1970’s when outside critics joined with those inside prisons to examine, criticize, and oppose state repression were the most fruitful in the modern history of criminology and did spawn a “new” critical stream of analysis and political activism that held considerable, if unrealized, promise. These critical and marxist social analysts seem to no longer remember their debt to, and the legacy of, the analysis and writings of prisoners. That is the point that must be made, and that is what, in part, underlies our creation of the *Journal of Prisoners on Prisons*.

Critical criminology is running in circles these days and seems incapable of transcending its own inability to move forward. What we currently see dominating books and

---

4 Psychological Survival: A Study of Long-Term Incarceration (Cohen 1981) was written with the assistance of long-term prisoners in the maximum security wing of Durham prison in England. The list of the outside members of this group reads like a line-up card of the British “new criminologists” and the founders of the National Deviancy Conference in England, Scotland, and Wales.

5 Foucault was a founding member of Le group d’Information sur les Prison which started in 1971 and aimed at giving prisoners a public voice. Like similar groups in Norway and England, it was not concerned with prison reform.
journals is the “same old stuff” dressed in a new language, but written in the same boring academic style, concerned primarily with its own armchair arguments and careerist endeavors. We need to get back in touch with those who know and experience the “reality of oppression” and to once again make the connections between the theoretical advances made by the “new criminologies” and the “material reality” they address. It is an even sadder state of affairs when those who claim to follow in a marxist tradition ignore a most vital aspect of this tradition’s analytic demand — the marriage of theory and practice, the holistic demand that theory be informed by the practical and material aspects of everyday life and struggle.

That is what we want this journal to accomplish — to bring the knowledge and experience of the incarcerated to bear upon these more academic arguments and concerns and to inform public discourse about the current state of our carceral institutions. Is it too much to ask of prisoners that they take the initiative and revitalize the work of critical criminology? I don’t think so, and the articles in this journal suggest otherwise. Furthermore, if the prison abolitionist argument that the goal and necessity of the outside critic should be to empower the disenfranchised, then providing the opportunity to prisoners to state their case, to identify the major problems, and to provide us with up to date information and analysis about what is actually occurring in our prisons is a necessity. Amongst the diverse group of people who serve as the carceral commodity there are many with extraordinary talents and insights, whose contributions can revitalize this barren area of study. Furthermore, as a teacher I am constantly in search of ethnographic materials which will provide insight to my students and will help to combat the “monster” stereotypes of the criminalized and incarcerated which dominate public and academic discourse. So there clearly is a role to be played by prisoners and a need for them to try and take back a small measure of control of their destinies by actively engaging the concerned public and by defining the dominant problems of the current situation. The articles in this
The literary work of prisoners constitutes a well established if largely unrecognized tradition within western literature. Many prisoners and former prisoners have been celebrated as writers over the years; Americans — Herman Melville, O.Henry, Carl Chessman, and Malcolm Braly — have made important literary contributions as have Europeans such as Victor Serge and Jean Genet. Bruce Franklin (1978) argues that this tradition’s origins in America can be located in the songs and poems of slaves, and that prison writing was pushed to the forefront of American literature in the 1960’s with the autobiography of Malcolm X and the work of George Jackson. Their books provided the impetus for a flood of contemporary prison writings and poetry. For Franklin, this tradition is largely that of the oppressed blacks of America, and more recently of other oppressed minorities. For example, a former prisoner, Ricardo Sanchez (1971; 1981) has established a world renown reputation as the father of American Chicano poetry.

Another source of prison writings is the officially sanctioned prison magazine. The first publication I am aware of was produced by members of the renowned Jesse James and Younger Brothers gang at a United States Penitentiary in the late 1800’s (See Baird 1967). In Canada the first prison magazines were the Kingston Penitentiary Telescope(1950) and Ste. Vincent de Paul’s Pen-o-Rama(1950), followed by Stony Mountain Penitentiary’s Mountain Echo(1951) and The Diamond(1952) from Collins Bay. While varying in focus, style, and quality, these magazines continue to be published and represent the sole (though censored) voice of Canada’s carceral population. However,

---

*For the past two years I have been researching and collecting prison magazines produced by prisoners in Canada. To date I have collected approximately two-thirds of the publications dating back to 1950. I would be pleased to accept any copies people would like to contribute. I would also be interested in corresponding with current and former prison editors who could share their views on these journals with me. Write to R. Gaucher 75 Laurier East, Ottawa KIN 6N5.
their distribution is not widespread and they remain largely unknown. Their importance is unacknowledged by both academics and the general public. The more focused format and targeted audience of the Journal of Prisoners on Prison holds the promise of transcending these problems and filling an important void. Its specific intent is to provide a legitimate avenue for prisoners in Canada to publish their analyses of Canada’s criminal-justice and penal industries. For its first issue, the organizing theme is prison abolition.

The popular notion that prison populations compose an homogeneous group, strongly influenced by prison culture and the “prisoner code” is denied by the wide range of opinion and degrees of understanding found in the articles in this issue. These articles contain diverse ideological and theoretical views, extending from traditional criticisms of the penitentiary per se to more contextualized arguments which portray the prison and its operation as a symptom of the problems which dominate the containing society.

The short opening piece, “An Inside Viewpoint”, takes a position similar to that of the American functionalist Robert K. Merton, arguing that it is the social structure of our society with its overemphasis on material goals and the lack of possibility of attaining them which frustrates people and drives them into drug abuse and related crime. The connection between excessive alcohol, other drug use, and lawbreaking is clearly argued in this paper and is a theme in most of these articles.

The essay by Alden Lepmer addresses the need to cease destroying people through society’s reliance on (the proven failure) imprisonment, largely using traditional arguments about the inappropriateness of incarcerating the “sick” or “pathological” individual. The author also addresses the contradictory demand that prisoners should be reformed and the penitentiary’s stifling of any and all attempts by prisoners to do so. Here he keys in on how the penitentiary authorities’ priorities - the facilitation of the orderly operation of the institution - leads to “clever ploys
and outright intimidation to get prisoners involved in a multitude of silly social groups, just to keep everyone busy and to stifle the possibility of original thought.”

In a more elaborated argument, Jo-Anne Mayhew addresses the forgotten minority, the female prisoner. Written on Canada’s Prison Justice Day (August 10) as a commemorative piece, Mayhew laments the futility of wasting human lives in the stultifying boredom of the prison. She forcefully argues that within the numbing inertia of prison life, women are especially victimized. Seen as an insignificant minority by the bureaucratic policy maker and prison administrator alike, women suffer even more acutely from the lack of meaningful programs and opportunities than the focus of so-called penal reform, the male prisoner. The author works through the well known problems associated with the only female penitentiary, “P.4.W”: the hardship of necessarily living miles from family and friends, the curtailment of activities because of the prison’s multi-security level status, and the refusal to offer women even the minor benefits of thirty years of “reforming” male prisons. She argues that for the woman’s penitentiary, policy shifts and penal reforms are even more a matter of semantic change. “It is well to understand that the new terminology does little to change the material substance of living.” She spells out the poverty of life in the archaic world of Kingston Prison for Women and in a free flowing often poetic language argues the case for abolishing incarceration for women, who too often are the products of long-term male abuse and who often are serving sentences for trying to overthrow this tyranny. Mayhew addresses the particularly devastating effects of incarcerating mothers and argues eloquently for alternative therapeutic means of dealing with female offenders. This author also notes the centrality of alcohol and other drug abuse as an intervening factor in female offenses, a problem clearly not addressed by the Prison For Women.

At this point Mayhew widens the frame of reference for understanding the criminalization of women (and men) by addressing the social structure and ideologies of capi-
talist society. Rejecting the "less eligibility principle" for the incarcerated poor and disenfranchised, she locates the problem within a patriarchal class structure which moralizes to the oppressed while playing out its own immoral charade. Mayhew ends by strongly advocating prison abolition (i.e., the abolition of retaliation) and supporting reconciliation.

Yves Bourque, a writer of passion and commitment, starts his essay with a personal account of his initial experiences of imprisonment. In a descriptive narrative he captures the alienation, bewilderment, and frustration of the prisoner's first encounters with the prison and the pronounced sense that the punishment often vastly exceeds the offence. In the second section Bourque addresses commonly held misconceptions about the nature of crime, prisoners and prisons, touching on the most current issues and debates within the Abolition movement. Bourque writes within the radical politically conscious tradition of the late 1960's and early 1970's, and in his work we hear the echoes of George Jackson's revolutionary cant: "Anyone who can pass the civil service examination yesterday can kill me today with complete immunity" (See Jackson 1970: 6). He explains the production of these "gross misconceptions" as the "justificatory ideology of a bloated insatiable criminal-justice and correctional system" which, with the assistance of the mass media, tell "only one side of the story", and consistently fail to identify the perpetrators of criminalizable offenses as previous victims of social inequality and often past victims of the brutality of the criminal-justice system itself. At this juncture he makes the telling point that even prisoners have become so completely taken in by this dominant criminal-justice ideology that they also scorn the concept of prison abolition, that the mass media distortion and process of desensitization serve to legitimize the degradation and torment of prison life for the public, prison personnel, and prisoners alike. He states that this is especially true for prisoners who come to acquiesce to their own oppression by giving in to prison demands. In this penetrating analysis, Bourque traces the self-fulfilling
prophesies of prison life through a complex dialectic of prison employee - prisoner interaction. It is within this process of forced submission that he locates “a major factor” in the cause of crime.

Bourque writes from the soul — from the centre of his being — with clear radical consciousness that critiques both the Canadian prison system and the society that produces it. A Canadian writer approaching the quality of Jackson or Genet, in Part Three, he provides the real stuff of prison living and in doing so attests to the fact that a human being can survive the onslaught of imprisonment with his sense of humanity intact. How else can one explain the marvelous flow of his passionate indignation but by recognizing that here is a man who knows human suffering as a human being, and who experiences life as life even within the systematic degradation and oppression he so ably analyses. This is not the writing of the deadened, heavy-eyed academic producing yet another essay to fill out his curriculum vitae or to fulfill job requirements. This is the real stuff of criminology and should be mandatory reading for the armchair academic analyst, for the bloodless bureaucrat who formulates penal policy, and for the glazed-eyed general public mesmerized by the fictitious presentations of television crime shows and the mass media news.

Bourque addresses many of the major issues of contemporary “corrections” and is particularly opposed to the use of women guards in male facilities. Those who oppose this “innovation” have found a spokesperson in Bourque, whose brilliant analysis surpasses anything his opponents have yet to offer. But then there are few spokespersons working in this field who can approach the depth of his understanding of what happens to human beings in our prisons. This author’s prescription is to recognize the damage we perpetrate and to change both the prison system and our society.

This last theme is taken up by the last two writers, Richard Sauve and William Senger. Sauve distinguishes the naive abolitionist position — “close all prisons” — with the
more realistic demand that we stop the system’s expansion and gradually eliminate it. He takes a strong position against trying to “reform” the prison by arguing that the ideology of prison reform has been the motor of prison expansion, and that we must start to take the “proven failure of prisons” seriously. His position represents an important stand in the prison abolition movement - namely, to stop sending people to prison, particularly property and non-violent offenders. That this is the only alternative is recognized by many abolitionists who argue for the decriminalization of social conflict (See Hulsman 1986). The author makes the point that the problem of abolition lies within the realm of the lack of societal will to take action.

William Senger continues along these lines in arguing that any attempt to reform the prison institution is misguided. He identifies the existing power structures of society as the key element reproducing the criminal-justice cycle, and notes that without recognition of this fact the prison abolition movement, in its best moments (e.g., creating public awareness), will lead to nothing. For Senger, it is the transformation of society which will curtail the current trajectory of expansion justified by prison reform ideology and lead to the abolition of the carceral institution.

Working for years as a political activist and intellectual in this field has led me to cringe at the prospect of reading yet another criminology text. My involvement with the International Conference on Prison Abolition has often left me with a strong sense of futility because of the “unreal arguments” and consideration we focus on, and because of our obvious failure to advance our position here in Canada. Within the movement arguments for reform and “new” alternative programs (here read net widening activities) still prevail, and it is difficult not to become disheartened at “the same old story”. If nothing else, the field of criminology is characterized by old goals and programs disguised as something new and innovative. But having the opportunity to read and comment on the essays in this journal has given me reason to pause, for here is the blood
and spit which first motivated me to study and contest “prison issues”. I came away from this task with the hope that we could renew the critical moment of the past and with the hope that this journal will motivate prisoners to once again take an active part in their social destiny and mine.

References
Franklin, B. (1978), *The Victim and Criminal as Artist*. Oxford University Press.


Sanchez, R. (1971), *Canto y Grito Mi Liberacion*.


About The Cover
Elizam Escobar was born in Puerto Rico. Between 1968 and 1980 he worked in New York City as an illustrator for various marxist publications and taught in the city's public schools. In 1979 he began to work as an artist in the Hispanic Arts Association and the Museo del Barrio. During these years his paintings were exhibited in the Bronx Arts Council, Workers Arts Festival, the Second Festival of Hispanic Art, and elsewhere.

In April, 1980 he was accused of belonging to the Armed Forces for National Liberation (of Puerto Rico) and convicted of seditious conspiracy. Elizam is now serving a sixty-eight year sentence. In prison he continues to paint and to write. The paintings have been exhibited in Chicago, New York City, and in Puerto Rico. His articles, poetry, and drawings appear in _De Pie en Luchar, Red Bass, Left Curve_, and other publications. A major exhibition entitled _Art As An Act Of Liberation_ has been organised by the Friends of Elizam Escobar Committee. In the catalogue for that exhibition Escobar writes:

Art and poetry, and their discourses, if they are for real, are always critical of Power: their politics is to transform reality and not to merely ideologize it. We should not pretend to possess truth or to have the only, unique truth. But an artist or a poet with a critical consciousness is always uncompromising with Power in relation to truth, in order to be for a revolution and real democracy.

Knowledge, Michel Foucault reminds us, is Power. For people, collectively and individually, to have control over determining the meaning of their lives, they must have the power to produce knowledge about themselves. The contributors to this first issue of the _Journal of Prisoners on Prisons_ have taken up the struggle to change the development of research about questions which deeply affect them. In doing so, they, like Escobar, seek to transform their reality by challenging the Power to inscribe and interpret that reality. Thus it seems appropriate that Escobar's "A Wel-
tanschaung," (which can be translated as "world-outlook") should be the frontispiece for the first issue of the journal.

A copy of the catalogue, *Elizam Escobar: Art As An Act Of Liberation* is available by writing to Friends of Elizam Escobar c/o Editorial el Coqui, 1671 N. Claremont, Chicago, IL 60647.

Howard Davidson