

# *Editor's Introduction*

*Howard Davidson*

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The most serious forms of oppression may not be those which we are quick to name but those which are buried just beneath the surface of our most commonplace assumptions, our day-to-day beliefs about how the world operates and how it ought to operate. When these beliefs are seriously challenged, one can feel quite literally the resistance to accept what is being said. This is the feeling I experienced when I first read through the articles collected here, especially the essays by Danny Homer, Little Rock Reed, and Arthur Solomon. By now I have read them over many times and I still react to their iconoclastic force.

This issue was not planned as a special issue on Native people and the prison; nor was it decided beforehand to print along side these articles the letters on political prisoners by C.J. Hinke and Susan Rosenberg. Homer's article arrived first and preparation for its publication was well underway when Solomon's article/poem appeared. My first reaction to the latter was "We don't publish poetry" and I prepared to return it with a note to this effect. Obviously, I did not, and instead, sent it on for review. Neither Dragan Milovanovic, who has prepared the response to this issue, nor any of its reviewers have had much to say about its statements. For the most part we speak of its form and style. Why is that?

I cannot speak for the others, and I invite them to reply, but for myself it is related to Homer's observations that that which white people do not know — and that which they cannot control — they fear, desecrate, and repress. And as Little Rock Reed notes in his analysis of the insidious imposition of Judeo-Christian culture through Anglo treatment programs, this behaviour emanates from white culture's most deeply seated assumptions about how the world works and how it should work, rather than any purposive intention to impose our will and interests.

It does not escape me either that these articles are disquieting because they are not about 'them': guards, the ruling class, whomever, but about us: *white people*. However, not one of these papers neglects to make it clear that white people are *not* inherently unjust. Not one would disagree with these words by Max Weber:

Where the market is allowed to follow its own tendencies, its participants do not look towards the person of each other but only towards the commodity; there are no obligations of brotherliness (sic.) or reverence, and none of the spontaneous human relations that are sustained by personal union (Weber in Rubenstein, 1983: 7).

But this more familiar terrain cannot and should not provide us with the opportunity to avoid the issues which are rightly placed at our feet. If we wish to be reminded that white people are fully capable of actively participating action as caretakers of the Earth rather than its exploiters, we may turn to the articles by C.J. Hinke or Susan Rosenberg.

On the day that I am writing this, the media reported that a leaked U.S. government memo names Canada as a country which will support a U.S. attempt to undermine initiatives to combat global-warming. Hinke's prediction that the prisons may soon be filled with environmentalists may prove to be of merit. I shall leave it to you to make the links between the issues described in his and Rosenberg's letters and the articles by Homer, Little Rock and Solomon. I want to use my last few lines to consider a different issue.

We reprinted Rosenberg's letter to the *Critical Criminologist* as a way of encouraging others to submit articles on the question of political prisoners; however, in doing so, we have created a possible pitfall, one that I believe Rosenberg herself would be quick to acknowledge. That is, we must guard against any tendency to recognize only the most serious examples of political imprisonment and to ignore the more frequent use of the jail sentence to deter and criminalize more minor actions of political resistance. When the suggestion was made to publish Rosenberg's letter it was decided to publish Hinke's at the same time in order to encourage the fullest possible discussion of the role of the prison in protest.

There was one additional reason for including the Hinke letters. Up to now we have published only one other article by a prisoner in a jail (See Anonymous, 1988). I began by stating that it is the most common assumptions that are the most difficult to challenge and change. I shall close by noting that one of these is the tendency to equate prisons with state and federal prisons. The fact remains that the jails house the majority of prisoners and function as the principal component of the "prison-machine". As Milovanovic notes, "creating...docile bodies and bodies of utility necessary for the smooth functioning of the newly emergent order." If to be iconoclastic is to hold out the promise for a different vision of the world and what it ought to be, we might do well not to forget this icon, too soon.

## REFERENCES

- Anonymous, (1988) "An Inside Viewpoint." *Journal of Prisoners on Prisons*, 1 (1), 6-7.
- Rubenstein, R.L. (1983) *The Age of Triage*. Boston: Beacon Press.