

ENEMIES OF THE STATE

*An Interview With Anti-Imperialist
Political Prisoners: David Gilbert,
Laura Whitehorn, and Marilyn Buck*

These comrades challenged the armed power of the government directly, ripping to shreds the cloak of “peaceful democracy” with which the bourgeoisie tries to cover its real crimes. In the ‘60s, the shift from peaceful petitioning to street demonstrations demanding the U.S. to stop its attacks on Vietnam transformed the movement into a force the government had to reckon with. The Black Panther Party didn’t stop with discussions of how to empower the Black community, they seized that power through a combination of direct action and armed self-defense. Similarly, many of the political prisoners and prisoners of war engaged in actions that moved beyond discussion and protest into challenging the basis of imperialism and colonialism. For the government, this raises the specter of real civil unrest, which must be stopped at its inception. That is why these comrades were systematically removed from their movements and communities.

Each time we defend these activists and bring their presence into our work, we challenge counterinsurgency. We build off the radical strategies of our immediate movement past and gain continuity. Continuity does not mean that the strategies of the past are necessarily those of the future. It just means that dialogue with those who have dedicated their lives to revolution will enrich our vision. As Mumia Abu-Jamal’s commentaries go out on the air waves, we are all strengthened.

Supporting political prisoners also challenges the system’s grip over our hearts and minds because their incarceration is held over all of our heads as a deterrent. It is one aspect of the repression and control of our movements, a direct carryover from the FBI COUNTERINTELLIGENCE PROGRAM (COINTELPRO) of the 1950s and ‘60s. Which is more frightening: being shot by the police or being buried alive? Where do we each take our fears as we build the movements of the twenty-first century, and deal with state repression today? Successful radical movement-building will always face repression; every sincerely radical organization must therefore have some aspect of their program that responds to political prisoners. Connecting with them teaches us about the state, but it can also give us hope. This is a time when our movements are rebuilding and reevaluating. There is a lull in domestic armed struggle and militant street actions. Work around the prisoners can and should be done from a general human rights perspective. It can also be done, however, by those who are radical and envision movements of the future that will again challenge the U.S. government to its core. The political prisoners own continued dedication and activism must be one sign to us in this very repressive time that the people are stronger than the system.

Whether or not a group’s specific daily work is around political prisoners or prison conditions, Resistance in Brooklyn (RnB) believes that everyone working toward revolutionary goals must give greater organizational priority to the work around freedom for our imprisoned comrades. In our imaginations, we can smash the barriers of fear and prison, as we organize to tear down the very real walls.

SOCIAL PRISONERS: people jailed for offenses which are not consciously political in nature (usually “everyday street crimes”); see also political prisoners.

STRUCTURAL ADJUSTMENT PROGRAMS: dictates from the International Monetary Fund and World Bank to all countries (mainly poor, Third World and Eastern European) with debts to Western banks, requiring those governments to cut social spending, remove food subsidies, fire state workers, devalue the value of their currency, cheapen exports and take other austerity measures in the interests of Western corporations.

UNITED FREEDOM FRONT: an armed, clandestine organization, primarily but not exclusively of revolutionary white North Americans, that bombed government/military/ targets in the early 1980s.

VENCEREMOS BRIGADE: a U.S. leftist organization that has organized, for more than two decades short trips by U.S. activists to Cuba to do concrete work (construction, cane-cutting, teaching, medicine, etc.) as acts of solidarity with the Cuban Revolution.

NUHWASHINGTON: one of “The New York Three”, three members of the Black Liberation Army, who were falsely convicted of murdering police officers in 1971. On April 28, 2000, after spending nineteen years behind bars, Nuh died of cancer. The others of the NY3, Jalil Muntaqin and Herman Bell, continue to serve life sentences in New York State prisons. Jalil is one of the founders of the Jericho Movement, seeking amnesty and justice for all U.S. political prisoners and POWs, the NYS local Jericho chapter has a focus on the New York Three and all NYSbased political prisoners. Jericho Movement, PO Box 650, New York, NY 10009.

WEATHER UNDERGROUND ORGANIZATION: a network of armed, clandestine collectives of revolutionary white North Americans, successors to one faction of Students for a Democratic Society; the WUO bombed government/military/corporate targets as part of its anti-imperialist campaign from 1969 to 1976 and published the theoretical work *Prairie Fire* in 1974.

IDA B. WELLS: Black woman who crusaded against lynching in the South.

YOUNG LORDS PARTY: a radical organization of Puerto Rican independence activists, active in Chicago and several East Coast cities from around 1969 to 1974 some chapters emerged from youth gangs called “the Young Lords.”

Resistance in Brooklyn (RnB)

RnB is an affinity group that came together in 1992 to combine political action, study, and a sense of community. Coming from a variety of organizations and tendencies within the progressive movement, we

fight-back, reaction appears to have consolidated. In this context, do you regret the sacrifice you made to fight against U.S. imperialism?

LW: A resounding NO! First of all, I believe that change can never take place without resistance. No matter how overwhelming the odds, struggle is the only path to justice. Without resistance, there is no hope of a better future, and resistance often demands sacrifice. To me, the decision not to fight not to resist would mean sacrificing my own humanity. That would be much worse than the sacrifices that I’ve had to make.

I believe that all kinds of resistance are necessary to oppose the consolidation of reactionary forces. I don’t feel that any of the forms of resistance I’ve been involved in over the past twenty-five years from mass struggle to armed actions are irrelevant to the future of progressive movements.

The armed activities I was involved in had, as their focus, anti-imperialist solidarity with national liberation struggles. And while it is true that some of the strategic underpinnings of those activities were proven incorrect like the conviction that wars of liberation within U.S. colonies would have achieved victory by now the fundamental goals of those movements remain the same. The peoples of Puerto Rico, NEW AFRIKA, and all oppressed nations in the U.S. empire still fight for freedom. The central goals of white anti-imperialists are also still relevant and alive. Whatever the methods, we still must fight against white supremacy and colonialism. None of the world changes over the past ten years have changed the need for citizens of an oppressive country to do what they can to stop the crimes of their government. If anything, these goals are more central today than in years past, because they are under greater attack.

Two examples of the continuing need for militant action come quickly to mind. In 1994, when Cuba was coming under, increasingly directly U.S. attack, it seemed to me that the white left in this country should have risen to the fore in defense of Cuba. I waited to hear that all those who’d gone on the VENCEREMOS BRIGADES over the years, and all those who’d learned the very meaning of solidarity from the example of Cuba (in Africa and Vietnam, for instance), were now taking action in cities all over the U.S. to show militant support of Cuba. Though we all might be confused by the major shifts in world politics, the defense of Cuba should have mobilized thousands. Yet it didn’t happen that way, despite valiant attempts by organizers of a rally in Washington and some small demos elsewhere.

Another example of the clear need for militant antiracist defense by white progressives followed the SIMI VALLEY TRIAL and subsequent Los Angeles rebellion. Here again, a few rallies, statements, and demos by some white progressives did take place, but no major long-term or clearly defined resistance in solidarity with Black people was developed. At a time when Black/New Afrikans’ basic human rights their existence itself was arrogantly challenged by the smug racism of white Amerika, most of the white left did not take action.

wrote numerous works on Black history; one of the founders of the modern PanAfricanist movement.

IMPERIALISM: the worldwide capitalist system in the 20th century, based on exploitation and control by a small number of wealthy, oppressor nations led by the U.S. of much of the world including oppressed nationalities inside the wealthy nations. Also defined by many to include the interlocking systems of white supremacy and patriarchy. For a fuller definition, see David Gilbert's comments.

MEXICANO NATION: according to some activists of Mexican descent in the U.S., the lands stolen from Mexico by war and annexation between 1835 and 1848, which, they argue, should be rightfully reunified with Mexico

WILLIAM MORALES: a former prisoner of war from the Puerto Rican Armed Forces of National Liberation (FALN); liberated from a New York City prison hospital by the FALN in 1979 and transported to Mexico, where he was recaptured in 1983 and finally (after an international pressure campaign) allowed to accept political asylum in Cuba, where he lives today.

NATIONAL LIBERATION FRONT (NLF): a revolutionary organization that led the people's war of liberation against U.S. domination in the southern half of Vietnam from 1960 until its victory in 1975.

NEW AFRIKA: the name applied by one sector of the Black liberation movement to the colonized nation of Black people in the U.S., which they say has a rightful claim to the land of five states in the South (South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi and Louisiana) where African slaves were most heavily concentrated, and which they advocate should become an independent nation called the Republic of New Afrika. One current voice of the New Afrikan movement is the New Afrikan Liberation Front, and its newspaper, Nation Time, PO Box 340084, Jamaica, NY 11434.

PATROLMEN'S BENEVOLENT ASSOCIATION: the nearly allwhite cops' union in New York City; frequently mobilizes against any kind of accountability, and specifically against indictments, of brutal and murderous cops.

LEONARD PELTIER: leader of American Indian Movement who was framed and arrested during an FBI shooting on the Pine Ridge, S. Dakota Lakota reservation in 1976; has been imprisoned since then and has lost all appeals. The Leonard Peltier Defense Committee is active nationwide, and based at: PO Box 10044, Kansas City, MO 64111.

POLITICAL PRISONERS: people who are jailed due to their progressive political activism, or occasionally social prisoners who are given extra prison time due to their progressive political activism while in prison.

at occasions when thousands of Black people turned out in churches and on streets to hear and talk to Fred Hampton, chairman of the Illinois BPP. The same thing was happening with the Young Lords in the Puerto Rican community, and there was great unity in action between the Young Lords and the Black Panthers. In those churches, on those streets, in rally after march after rally, the depth and strength of the demand for freedom and political power was unmistakable.

When the Chicago cops and FBI assassinated Fred Hampton on December 4, 1969, it made it clear to me what I had already accepted: that the fight of Black people would have to involve armed struggle. Like the people of Puerto Rico, the Native American nations, and the MEXICANO NATION within the U.S. like the struggle of the Vietnamese the movements fighting against the U.S. government would have to utilize armed struggle, because the U.S. state saw these struggles as tearing apart the very fabric of their empire and their illegitimate power. The BPP's ten-point program like the programs of revolutionary nationalists such as the Republic of New Afrika was based on the same goals as the national liberation struggles in Africa, Asia, and Latin America: land, justice, economic and political independence the right of self-determination.

I had always hated racism and couldn't understand why it was so deeply ingrained in every single aspect of U.S. society. After 1969, I felt that I understood it better as well as how to fight to change it. In order for the U.S. ruling class to maintain power, it was necessary for them to maintain control over the New Afrikan nation, the other internal colonies, and Puerto Rico. This dominance would only begin to change when those nations had their independence and freedom. It became clear to me that revolutionary anti-imperialism was the best strategy for fighting racism and injustice and that armed struggle as well as mass struggle would be needed.

As I learned more about Vietnam from my work supporting their struggle, I understood how the context of national liberation struggle could transform a nation, and the women in particular, from powerlessness to creativity and strength. Resisting domination on a variety of levels was a major part of creating new women, new men, new nations.

It also appeared that armed struggle could be a way to speed up the victory of a people and thus to lessen a nation's suffering. It seemed to me that those of us in the belly of the beast citizens of the imperialist power could shorten the war by attacking the U.S. military and political machinery inside the U.S. We could play a significant role in shortening the war by increasing the material and political costs. This was an important strategic point for anti-imperialists within the antiwar movement, and it applied to solidarity with other national liberation struggles as well. That's why I took part in mass confrontations, in attacks on military think tanks and in building takeovers at big universities. It's also why I later took part in armed actions against targets like the NYC Patrolmen's Benevolent Association, the Israeli aircraft industries, and the U.S. War College and Capitol Building.

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

MUMIA ABUJAMAL: a Black political prisoner on death row in Pennsylvania since 1982, convicted of murdering a Philadelphia cop in a trial widely viewed as grossly unfair; as a teenager, had been an information minister with the Black Panther Party; later became a prominent radio and print journalist specializing in exposing police brutality and other oppression against people of color in Philadelphia. The NYC Free Mumia AbuJamal Coalition can be reached at PO Box 650, New York, NY 10009, 2123308029, www.mumia.com; International Concerned Family and Friends of Mumia are located at PO Box 19709, Philadelphia, PA 19143.

SUNDIATA ACOLI: prisoner of war from the Black Liberation Army, arrested along with Assata Shakur in New Jersey in 1973; like her, convicted of murdering a state trooper, serving life in federal prison. The Sundiata Acoli Freedom Campaign can be reached at PO Box 5538 Manhattanville Station, Harlem, NY 10027.

AMERICAN INDIAN MOVEMENT (AIM): a militant aboveground movement, primarily based in midwestern and western cities, of Native American activists demanding sovereignty over lands guaranteed their nations in over 300 treaties with the U.S. government; formed in 1968, still exists today.

ANTI-IMPERIALIST: an ideological position viewing worldwide capitalism as a system of imperialism, dominated by the U.S., and focusing one's analysis and activism around that view. Many political prisoners adopting this label differ from the common U.S. leftist definition of this term (limited to external domination) to include opposition to U.S. internal colonialism against oppressed nationalities, such as Blacks, Puerto Ricans, Chicanos/Mexicans, Native Americans, etc.

ARMED PROPAGANDA: a revolutionary tactic involving armed attacks against government/corporate/military targets coinciding with printed statements aimed at raising public consciousness about the crimes of these institutions, and inspiring more people to heighten their resistance.

BLACK LIBERATION ARMY (BLA): a network of armed, clandestine local collectives active from about 1970 to 1981, primarily composed of former members of the Black Panther Party, aiming to use military means (such as bombings and attacks on police officers) to support the broader struggle for Black liberation in the U.S.; some collectives were aligned with the wing of the Black liberation movement advocating independence for New Afrika.

BLACK PANTHER PARTY (BPP): full name: Black Panther Party for self-defense, begun in 1966 by followers of Malcolm X, advocating Black nationalism, militant armed self-defense, and Black community control; at its height, had chapters in many cities throughout the U.S., an international wing based in Algeria, and a broad following among the Black community.

to use the concept of "being at war" too loosely, in a way that I no longer would. I think I believed, for example, that the level of confrontation between oppressed nations and the imperialist state meant we all existed in an active state of war and that any unnecessary casualties would be justified by the wartime conditions. I don't believe, however, that this type of thinking dominated the practice of the revolutionary armed groups. Any time there was a casualty, of course, the government made sure it was broadcast far and wide.

I still believe there's a war by the ruling class against oppressed people, especially against Black people. But I also think that revolutionary forces have the ability and the responsibility to make armed actions speak for themselves, so the actions don't need a lot of justifying. Whenever we have to explain or defend our actions, we are immediately at a disadvantage, because the government and police control so much of the media.

I believe that fighting for justice necessitates fighting for power. I don't think, for instance, that it will be effective to fight racism in the U.S. without also challenging white supremacy and the system of imperialism that it's a part of. And I believe that fighting for power means a lot more than protesting bad things that the government does. Revolutionary violence is an important means of self-defense for oppressed communities under attack from the violence of the state. It is an integral part of fighting for power.

RnB: What were the specific historical conditions that were the context for your decision to take up armed struggle?

LW: The late 1960s era of rising wars of national liberation for land and independence convinced me that in order to be part of making revolution, I had to support and take up armed struggle. Vietnam was an especially strong example of this, but I was also influenced by the anti-colonial struggles in Latin America and Africa. Because the U.S. had used arms and genocidal violence to enslave and possess oppressed nations inside the U.S. and Puerto Rico, it seemed clear that revolutionary violence would be needed to overthrow colonial control. And how could I support liberation for any of those nations, yet be unwilling to fight for it myself?

I witnessed the process of nation-building that went on when Vietnam mobilized its people to fight a war of national independence and self-defense. Colonialist domination especially where white supremacy is involved tries to destroy the humanity, dignity, and character of a nation. The process of organizing to seize power the process of learning to use armed struggle for that goal is part of a process of reclaiming human worth from the oppression of colonial domination. Supporting the process of people's war, including lending material support at the level of armed resistance, made perfect sense to me.

and prison work are not relevant or strategic to the U. S. internal program and strategy then how can political prisoners/POWs and prisons be integral to the strategies of justice and liberation?

RnB: What are your thoughts on the current political climate and on possible strategies for movement building?

MB: I think we are in the midst of a fascist consolidation. The iron fist has not yet manifest itself fully, but it will. It appears to me that the white Left in general does not share such a view. Of course, in Germany in the late '20s and early '30s most German citizens did not experience rising Nazism as dangerous to their social existence not until military bombings, food shortages, etc. Most people were little concerned about the death and concentration camps. Dead and imprisoned communists, mass genocide of Jewish and Gypsy peoples and Soviet citizens, were not of concern to the vast majority. But these camps and prisons were hell for the imprisoned and moneymakers for the capitalist class seizure of property, slave labor, etc.

There is a crying need for stronger antiracist organizations. I do not believe that any white person who says he or she believes in and supports the goals of justice, human rights, liberation, cannot engage in organized antiracist activity and still call her or himself progressive, radical, or left. How can any woman who identifies herself as a feminist not struggle against racism, white supremacy after all, those peoples who are oppressed are at least 50 percent women! W. E. B. Du Bois posed that the problem of the color line is the problem of the 20th century. It still is and will be in the 21st century. Issues of class and gendersex oppression cannot be separated from the issue of racial domination and white supremacy. And if we white people who are progressive will not stand up to resist racial genocide and barbaric U.S. policies, what other white people will.

In the U.S. the conditions of scapegoating setting up a group (or groups) of people are well entrenched. People of African descent have been treated historically as the enemy, the scapegoats, the "other," and most of all as inferior because of one of the pillars and justifications of American history white supremacy. Not only African people are under increasing attack. All other people identifiable as not "American" by their skin color or name or physical characteristic are also targets. There needs to be a refocusing on issues of liberation and justice. More anti-imperialism. It is not enough to hate the state because it is a state; we need to be able to support peoples around the world who are in opposition to imperialism to support ongoing national liberation movements from the Zapatistas to Puerto Rican independentistas and Black liberationists. We are in an objectively difficult period of history, where the forces for liberation and justice have lost the momentum. We, as a broad front, do not yet seem to have found a strategic vision to rebuild our forces, much less how to slow down the trampling of capitalism.

of Rodney King. At the same time as I felt that mass action was most critical in that period, I believe that small armed actions would have made a positive difference.

In terms of armed self-defense, I definitely believe it has a role to play today. I don't understand why a period marked by the strength of reactionary forces needs to be a period of only legal activities by leftists. That thinking allows fear to be perpetuated! I think that it's important to have good plans and to minimize the risk of arrest in this period more busts for long sentences wouldn't help much! But I don't think that means that all kinds of creative, illegal resistance should stop.

Sometimes it seems to me particularly important to be thinking about illegal forms of struggle now, just because the right wing is in such control. It would be a shame for us to be caught unprepared as the state moves more toward all kinds of attacks on human rights, and as legal forms of struggle become fewer and riskier.

I do think that the nature of armed action needs to be responsive to the level of struggle at any given time and to the level of mobilization and anger focused around any particular issue in question. From my own history, I think that bombing the U.S. Capitol and other political and military buildings after the invasion of Grenada (and while the U.S. was waging a counterrevolutionary offensive in Central America) was fine and correct. But I think it was wrong to raise, in our message claiming the Capitol action, the threat of killing congressmen and senators because it doesn't seem to me that assassination was anywhere within the realm of what the anti intervention and pro-Grenada movements in this country were thinking about or would be prepared to defend. It should be noted that many people in the COMMITTEE IN SOLIDARITY WITH THE PEOPLE OF EL SALVADOR (CISPES) and other groups did defend the bombings themselves both at that time and later, even when they came under FBI scrutiny and after we were busted.

RnB: Given some of your histories, what are some of the achievements or errors of the anti-imperialist movement and its armed clandestine organizations that you participated in?

[Answered jointly by Laura and Marilyn:]

LW & MB: It's a huge question, so we broke it down somewhat mechanically, and our answers will be shorthand. We felt strongly that the two areas the anti-imperialist movement and armed clandestine groups have to be looked at together, because they developed together. For the sake of this question's order, though, we began by responding to the two areas separately.

We feel that anti-imperialist politics and organizations made a number of important ideological contributions. We derived our strategy of revolutionary anti-imperialism from Che Guevara's speech to Cuba's Tricontinental

can people, Hawaiians, Mexicans. Without equality of nations, there can be no justice. There will be no economic-political system that will emerge that has the potential to defend and nurture human beings.

RnB: Once you're in prison, does your political work end, or does "being a political prisoner" become your political work?

MB: One can never rest on one's laurels. Without engaging in ongoing political work and struggle one does not remain politically centered. The purpose of prison is to stifle, attack, and destroy a person's ethical, political, social character. Unless we resist that, then we begin to lose who we are. It is through political work and struggle that we can maintain our political and social identities. It is easy to lose a sense of who you are. To enter prison is to enter another world where the basic propositions are different deformed. A defective mirror world that recreates the world of capitalist relations.

Each of us finds different ways to work, not unlike the vast extent of political life for you who live in the world. There you may be ideologues, community activists, organization builders, solidarity and support groups, and/or cultural workers. Here we do the same. I see my daily existence as political work. This means first and foremost that I not succumb to corruption, that I be principled, honest, and straightforward in my dealings with everyone. That is not a simple undertaking. Resisting corruption is a reality for you in the world as well! I engage in political projects, including AIDS peer group work, support for cultural activities, education projects, etc. I have taught classes and am now tutoring. I see education as an important role here. Most of this work has a primarily social character but reflects my own political beliefs in the necessity to secure the tools for reliance. And of course I along with others struggle over conditions when and where possible and confront racism. Our political work would be comparable to that of you who engage in community political work. Presently most of us are actively involved in building the campaign to save Mumia from the death penalty and ultimately to free him along with all political prisoners and POWs. I participate in some of the control unit work and am an advocate that we in the left take in more strategically the death penalty as a particular embodiment of racial genocide as a class bludgeon. The left as a whole has not paid much mind to fighting the death penalty. We have been wrong not to do so. The climate created by the restoration of the death penalty has led to open hunting season against Black people in particular; the police have more license than ever to attack, brutalize, frame, and murder black people. There is a growing index of white on black violence including assaults by racist white youth, even preteens. The entire social climate has degenerated. The state can kill whom it wants regardless of issues of law and justice. The lynching mentality is becoming prevalent. Will we let the struggles led by IDA B. WELLS, W.E.B. Du Bois and countless other African people to create an anti-lynching-climate and social contract be tossed into the waste bin of history?

prisoners and prisoners of war. We worked to expose the FBI's Counterintelligence Program (COINTELPRO), which was responsible for destroying organizations, killing Black leaders like Fred Hampton, and putting others in prison. In our work to support political prisoners and POWs, we tried to educate people not only about the injustice and criminality of the system that imprisoned them, but also about who these revolutionaries are and why the government was so afraid of them.

The national liberation struggles and clandestine anti-imperialist allies acted to free political prisoners like Assata Shakur and WILLIAM MORALES. Nothing can ever cast a shadow on the importance of their freedom. These were achievements the public anti-imperialist movement played a role in as well, working to create an atmosphere of support within the community and resisting police and FBI attempts to find the liberated prisoners. From 1967 to the mid-1980s, both the aboveground anti-imperialist organizations and the armed clandestine groups marched, demonstrated, and fought. We did armed and mass militant actions. We built material aid campaigns for most of the leading struggles for freedom around the world from Vietnam, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, the Congo/Zaire, and Zimbabwe; to the struggles at Wounded Knee, Big Mountain, and in Puerto Rico; to the Black Panther Party and all the struggles for independence, land, and political power led by revolutionary Black Nationalists in the national territory of the Republic of New Afrika.

In building this work, we tried to do what the national liberation movements themselves defined as strategically important. At both the public and clandestine levels, revolutionary anti-imperialists united with progressive movements around the world who defined imperialism as the enemy. From the late 1960s to the present, we've supported struggles that were not popularly supported by many white leftists such as in Palestine, Iran, and Eritrea.

Some of our errors included being unclear about what we meant when we said our strategy was carried out "under third world leadership." At times, we interpreted what the leadership of any given struggle was arguing for to suit our own politics. At other times, we became involved in debates inside other movements that were inappropriate for us to be active in. It's fine to have opinions and positions about the liberation struggles of other peoples whom you support, but it was and is wrong to intervene in the middle of debates within a national liberation struggle.

It was an achievement to try to deal with the "time table" or agenda of struggle defined by the oppressed nations, rather than as it was determined by white leftists. This was especially true in the arena of armed struggle and other forms of militancy: the national struggles, as a result of national oppression and colonization, have a different objective relationship to the state than white leftists do. There has always been some level of warfare being waged by the ruling class against the oppressed nations; genocide mandates a timetable for struggle different from the relationship between

propaganda? Small, armed clandestine groups were able in this country to ignite popular resistance for a multitude of reasons. Do the conditions of ferment and discontent with the state exist, or does the vast majority either have faith in the state with reforms or fear other specters raised by the state more. There are a multitude of questions to examine, analyze, and answer. I'm not in a position to understand all the social and political forces at play and do not have the benefit of significant analytical or political dialogue and struggle with people who might be trying to get a sense of direction, to regroup after this extended mourning over the "fall of the Wall." I hope the shock and sense of defeat has passed sufficiently to begin looking forward beyond the siege mentality or the single-issue focus. We definitely need a vision a clear-eyed, revolutionary analysis and a political strategy. Only in such a context can the question of armed struggle as a strategic force be understood and considered.

However, we as actors in the creation of human history can build our forces, strengthen our own subjective conditions to the degree where objective conditions can be affected. We also have the necessity and responsibility to defend against oppression and exploitation. What will happen if the forces of fascism the U.S. government "go ballistic" and implement aspects of its repressive machinery? Will political folks be ready to resist to survive! to function as a resistance movement. Or will there be small groups of individuals being brave but not able to fire up the popular will to fight back against genocide and terror. The war for liberation is indeed a battle for hearts and minds. I also still believe that it will be the international class struggle primarily the former and continuing colonies will be the motor force of a resurgence of revolutionary struggle. Nevertheless, as people of the imperialist nation, it remains our responsibility and desire to support and act in solidarity with emerging struggles, as well as to create the vision and strategy to change the nature of this society! After all, is not this U.S. with its corporate capitalism and military expansiveness not a primary cause of human misery worldwide. Would we not be better able to develop human potential, democracy, justice, liberation in a non-oppressor society?

RnB: Given some of your histories, what are some of the achievements or errors of the anti-imperialist movement and its armed clandestine organizations that you participated in?

[See Laura and Marilyn's joint answer on page 16]

RnB: How have your years in prison and the changes in the world over these past years affected how you view and understand the systems of imperialism and oppression?

MB: Being in prison hasn't affected my view of imperialism. The objective reality of what imperialism is and how it functions does not change because the individual's relationship to it has changed. Prison does expose capitalist relations, at its crudest exploitation of labor, repression and very

clarity work. We did not join in struggles specific to women which, while reformist, are important steps in the process to destroying male supremacy and its institutions. This was even more true of lesbian and gay liberation. So many of us and our comrades were dykes, yet support for lesbian and gay liberation was barely a part of our program. We listed it as something we struggled for, but never had any programmatic work to give it life. We failed to even struggle against homophobia when it presented itself, often keeping closeted about our own lesbianism. This was true even with some of our closest comrades in various third world liberation movements. We had been part of a strong anti-imperialist sector of the early antiwar and women's liberation movements and building actions in support of Vietnam and other national liberation struggles specifically as lesbians and women. But as time went on, we lost some of the content of our politics that had embraced human liberation on a broad revolutionary scale.

In all of our work, we explicitly supported armed struggle, and that was important. Too many white left groups have supported anti-colonial struggles but have condemned their armed strategies. Many other white leftists, who did support armed struggle in national movements in other parts of the world, refused to accept the legitimacy of armed struggle inside the Puerto Rican, Black or New Afrikan, Native American, and Mexicano nations. One of our main achievements is that we not only supported armed struggle but also engaged in it, in solidarity with the national liberation movements. Some of our early actions were specifically meant to take the heat off of armed organizations in the national liberation struggles, and some of those actions succeeded in doing that. At other times, clandestine work was done in concert with a particular national liberation organization. In addition, our actions raised issues or chose targets based on solidarity. All of these were part of a revolutionary practice to fight imperialism alongside the national liberation struggles.

The anti-imperialist armed clandestine groups argued that it was necessary for members of the oppressor nation to fight against the crimes of our own government. By putting this principle into practice, we tried to break through some of the legalism and passivity that has kept white radicals from active resistance. As the political tenor of the country gets more conservative and reactionary, we think that this was a very important contribution.

Another contribution, growing from the recognition that we need to take the state seriously as our enemy, was our practice of building some radical work on a clandestine basis. Over the last several decades, various attempts have been made to build anti-imperialist, armed clandestine organizations. None of these attempts succeeded completely; they either self-destructed because of internal political problems or were captured by the state. But the attempts the direction and the commitment not just to protest but to actually fight injustice has been an achievement.

Over my many years of struggle I have learned that overthrowing this vile, people-hating system is not a simple, direct task. It is not to be achieved by random actions or acting to be acting or to relieve frustration. Action without a clear strategy based on a materialist analysis of both the objective and subjective conditions will not either necessarily advance the struggle, nor spontaneously organize the masses of people to join. At the same time, change and victory are not possible without acting.

Seizing power is by its nature a violent act, even if one does not march in with rifles. Social and political change are slow conditions. In the final analysis, it will only be through organized resistance that imperialism and capitalism, with all their intrinsic forms of violent oppression, will be overthrown. And only winning will enable any of us truly to speak of justice or justification.

RnB: What were the specific historical conditions that were the context for your decision to take up armed struggle?

MB: At the end of the Second World War, there was a rise in the anti-colonial struggles worldwide. Nations chained and gagged by European and American colonialism rose up, ripped d the gags from their mouths, and cried, "Freedom." National liberation was on the march. Vietnam was one of those nations. They defeated the French in 1954; within a short time, the U.S. was trying to reestablish domination from the South over the North. Cuba threw off the he shackles of a dictatorship so corrupt that even the U.S. felt embarrassed to be supporting it and the mafia; it was when it declared itself independent that the U.S. instituted its war.

In the U.S. after Black soldiers had returned from fighting in World War II, there was a rising up to demand justice, civil rights, economic inclusion; Latinos, Native Americans, Puerto Ricans demanded self-determination and independence. It was a historical moment. There was a sense of a new world, standing up poised to emerge from the dungeons in which it had lain shackled and gagged. People worldwide picked up arms to take back their lives, their lands, their human rights and dignity. Armed struggle was a means to drive out the imperialist dictatorship of the colonizers, to force the military or oligarchical dictatorships that were bleeding to death the masses of people in many countries. My consciousness was stirred; my complacency as an American woman nan was challenged. I had been brought up to be believe in justice, democracy, equality, and to question. And as a woman I felt held back, constrained. All the little inequalities fueled by anger and the necessity to be part of the new world. However, it was the Black Power movement and the Black Panther Party that awakened many young people to the fact that there was a wax raging against the dispossessed led by this very country the belly of the beast, as Che Guevara referred to the U.S. and it was time to fight back. The Palestinians, in their own way, also had a boldness of "dare to struggle, dare to win" which electrified the whole world. How many more could I name...

of imperialism. Or how much I believed that through people's war the liberation of Puerto Rico and New Afrika would be taking place right about now, with a strong armed and political anti imperialist solidarity movement led by white oppressor nation communists.

So I guess I'd have to cop to having to adjust my views to a different scenario and time table! What hasn't changed, though, is my view that there will eventually be successful struggles that develop a new form of socialism, that the fundamental contradictions of imperialism still exist and still cause suffering and necessitate resistance. What hasn't changed is my view that human beings will not settle for a culture of death.

I also do not see any of the cataclysmic changes (like the breakup of the Soviet Union) as signifying the end of revolution. I believe that history develops unevenly, with defeats and setbacks as well as victories and advances. Sometimes when I hear leftists on the outside saying how impossible it is to do something or how difficult it is to stay political because of all the changes in the world, I get a creepy feeling. It reminds me of the trap that I think some of the "old left" the people of my parents' generation who were in or around the Communist Party U.S.A. and labor movement fell into. They put all their hope in the Soviet revolution, and when Stalin's atrocities were unmasked, they lost all faith in socialist struggle. They became bitter, depressed, and some became mouthpieces for virulent anti-communism.

In addition to these vast changes in the world scene, I've also, during these past eleven years, seen some more encouraging developments. All over the Southeast of the U.S., to name one, there are new organizations led by African American women that are dealing with AIDS, health, and survival issues and doing it from either a revolutionary or a progressive perspective. As some of the women themselves say, these groups will form the backbone for a resistance movement in the future. That's one example among many I can think of, just from my own very limited experience, of how people are not giving up the struggle.

It may be all on a smaller and narrower plane, but the struggle keeps on keeping on.

RnB: Once you're in prison, does your political work end, or does "being a political prisoner" become your political work?

LW: No not at all. I'd have to say my political work consists basically of three areas: being a political prisoner, organizing and being part of the struggles for justice inside the prisons, and being part of the fight against HIV and AIDS.

The first one- being a political prisoner has many parts, including trying to break through the isolation of prison via correspondence and whatever phone calls or visits are possible. I try to contribute to the struggles in

In the late '60s and early '70s, those who fought against oppression and challenged the state were not called "terrorists." That is a term the U.S. government began to use later, after it lost the war to Vietnam, once it began to revise history and try to regain its position and power, once it had begun to have success in suppressing the revolutionary, liberation movements in this country, using COINTELPRO and its repressive apparatus. So now I am here, an enemy of the state, called all kinds of things from criminal to terrorist, everything but what we are political prisoners.

RnB: We hear all the time about people who were revolutionaries in the 1960s and who now have bought into white corporate America. What have been your experiences with this?

MB: I have been treated as an enemy of the state a traitor to the white race. So I am not holding my breath waiting for any calls. Well, I've not been asked to join white corporate America so I have no experiences in that realm. Thank goodness. Since I lost my desire to become a woman economist, Wall Street type a very short-lived desire, from a high school senior until about three weeks into Economics 101 I haven't wanted to join in the system. In fact, white U.S. culture as a whole, I find to be very deadening, even though I'm white and live in it. Perhaps it's because it is not only deadening but deadly to most people of the world (and plants and animals, by the way).

But we all live in and experience this white-supremacist-based society. Our education, point of view, is formed and framed by this world we live in. Even though there are white people who have morals and ethics who reject as unjust, inhuman, the oppressive nature of this society. It is very difficult not to succumb to the privileges and comforts of this society. Even many from oppressed nations and minorities have access to some of the materialistic-consumer benefits of this society if it can be paid for in cash or on credit. It becomes easy to buy into the society but still see oneself in opposition to its excesses and injustices. Therein lies the material base of many debacles over social democracy, revolution, etc. What is most difficult is to challenge the system that makes this society and culture so alluring and habit forming. If you believe your eyes, and open them up to find yourself an addict, though perhaps you deny the addiction. After all, there are some good things. But do they outweigh the vast array of negative, deadly, disastrous consequences heaped upon the majority of the world's peoples?

So it is not unexpected. I understand it, But I do not condone such accommodation, not even after nearly fifty years of living here. However, until there is a rise of progressive, radical, and revolutionary struggle, many will continue to burn out, dropout, "take a break."

It is hardest to be a revolutionary in a non-revolutionary period. And we've been in a non-revolutionary period for more than fifteen years. There

LW: The death penalty, control units, and the need for release: to free all political prisoners and prisoners of war.

The death penalty is an issue every progressive person needs to address and fight. Among political prisoners, Mumia's life is still in danger, and antipolice brutality organizer Ajamu Nasser was executed by the state of Indiana in December 1995. His codefendant, Ziyon Yisrayah, faces the death penalty as well [editors note: Yisrayah was executed in 1996]. I think the massive support for Mumia last summer shows that the potential exists to organize a campaign to stop the death penalty. It's such a fundamental human rights issue.

Control units are torture, and we have to be able to fight them. The goal of such units is to destroy the human personality and spirit. The maximum security unit in Florence, Colorado, sounds like a true nightmare, as is the one in Pelican Bay, California, and the growing number of state units, too. I see this as a life and death issue.

The extraordinary length of political prisoners' and POWs' sentences and the refusal of the government to release anyone has got to be fought. I'm one of the lucky few I'll be released in 1999, after serving fifteen years in prison on a twentythreeyear sentence. When I get out, I plan to work on a campaign for the release for political prisoners and prisoners of war, with an international and a domestic component. The sentences that political prisoners and prisoners of war have received amount to death sentences, because of our age and because of the stresses that prison puts on our health. Nearly every other country recognizes that it holds political prisoners, and many have been released. Look at all the RED ARMY FRACTION (RAF) prisoners who have been released in Germany. It's only the U.S. that doles out such huge sentences and then denies that we're political. I don't care how unreal anyone says this goal is we need to fight for and win the release of all political prisoners and prisoners of war. Many of the political prisoners and POWs in the U.S. have served at the very least twenty-five years. Most have served much more. We cannot accept being buried alive.

Finally, I think it needs saying that there are far too many prisoners of war and political prisoners who get no financial, personal, or political support, even from progressive people. It's extremely rough to be locked up without the funds to buy even basic hygiene things from commissary. Yet that is what a lot of POWs face. Comrades outside can contribute through a number of channels whether through the various organizations that represent Puerto Rican and New Afrikan prisoners or through the Anarchist Black Cross Federation's War Chest program.

RnB: What are your thoughts on the current political climate and on possible strategies for movement building?

Revolutionaries are lovers of humanity with all its/our greatness and weakness. Who among us the political prisoners and POWs in the U.S. would not be doing something socially or politically progressive-if we were released from behind these walls and concertina wire. We bring an incredible amount of history, experience, and humanity to all that we do.

Despite the constraints, I am not dead. I am alive, looking always to the future, always looking to be a part of political-social progress. I have too much to offer I can still think, analyze, be a productive person. I, along with all the other political prisoners, provide an example, experience, and the potential of resistance, steadfastness, hope. Those who have died are remembered, even if not by name. We are the fertilizer for the future, but are not ready to be relegated to museums, to be objects to be displayed.

I feel the pain of every single day here. I regret and miss the simple things family, children, a lover, separation from comrades, and involvement in political struggle. But after each nightmare of a day passes, it is history and I look forward to what is to come.

Nevertheless, my name is not Pollyanna. I believe the political, social, and economic conditions will only get worse before movements consolidate to seriously take on state power. I don't look forward to all that means, either here in the deepest belly of the beast or there in the streets. Suffering does not wear well. I see a much more brutal fascist regime on the near horizon. The legal machinery for it is in place from the death penalty, to the prison warehouse/factories, to laws based in racial genocide and class extermination. More and more people particularly those of the colonized nations will be sacrificed to its blood-consuming appetites. Who will stand up, who will be part of the resistance force that refuses to accept barbarity, genocide? I will be, however I can be.

RnB: Looking back over your own personal and political history, how did you first become politically aware and active? How and why did it lead you in an anti-imperialist direction?

MB: I became politically aware before I became politically active. Awareness is a process of observing the world around you, integrating your own experiences to those beyond yours. Nevertheless, without action, awareness is unrealized, or even suppressed, potential.

My father was a civil rights activist a minister. So I was raised with a set of human-oriented values and ethics. But as a teenager I did not join in the civil rights movement. I did nothing. Instead I wanted to fit in, be popular, though in one sense I could not be, because of who my father was. I resented that then. I understood not too many years later. The seeds of my own discord lay in being "female" in this society. This was an oppression I could identify, understand, and ferment from this place. I could see beyond dry intellectual awareness of injustice, inequality, oppression, to the need to do something to break out of this bondage. But I did not know what to do, except be angry, alienated.

Marilyn-David-Laura-Haiku

Love for the people
means nonstop struggle against
imperialism
- David Gilbert, 10/97

David Gilbert

David Gilbert was a founding member of Columbia University Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) and returned to Columbia three years later to be active in the 1968 student strike there. He is serving a seventy-five-year-to-life sentence on charges of participating, as an anti-racist ally of the Black Liberation Army (BLA), in a 1981 failed expropriation. David can be reached directly at # 83A6158, Attica Correctional Facility, Box 149, Attica, New York, 14011-0149

RnB: Over the past years that you've been in prison since 1981 many changes have taken place in the world and in our movements. When you made your decision to take militant action, there was a sense of worldwide revolution on the rise. Now, although there are many trends of protest and fight back, reaction appears to have consolidated. In this context, do you regret the sacrifice you made to fight against U.S. imperialism?

DG: I definitely hate being in prison and, especially, the burden that's placed on my loved ones. But I knew there were risks in going up against the power structure. The seventeen years in prison have only deepened my awareness of the totally antihuman nature of this social system. For example, with AIDS, prison administrators have generally displayed an inexcusable resistance to the peer education programs on prevention that could save many, many lives, and prisons have often acted with a heartless lack of care and support for prisoners with AIDS. And now I've experienced more directly how thoroughly racism and brutality are built into "criminal justice" in this country. There are about 1.5 million persons behind bars in the today. Without romanticizing the portion of crimes that prey upon the oppressed, the terrible rate and toll of incarceration is overwhelmingly the result of unjust racial and economic structures.

In terms of our case, there were certainly specific errors that I regret tactical errors and political errors, too. Maybe we can characterize them later in the interview. These mistakes led to heavy human costs on both sides, and they also constituted a setback in the struggle against injustice.

But in terms of the basic principles and the broad commitment to the struggle, I have no regrets. You see, I've always had this core feeling that people matter; that people of color, women, the poor, children, lesbian and gays are all my brothers and sisters; that my sense of myself is totally bound up in what happens to all of us. Once I saw how imperialism is such a relentless destroyer of human life and potential ... there really wasn't any other choice for me, no other way but to fight imperialism. On this level my only regret is not doing so more effectively.

simply a creation of the state. Some of those formations sincerely and vehemently oppose the government (which juggles to fulfill the ruling class's range of international interests) with a program that, in essence, calls for a return to the pioneer days' ethos that any white male had the right to lay violent claim to Native American land, New Afrikan labor, and female subservience. Such movements can become a radical right "alternative" to and savior for a failing capitalism, like the Nazi party was during the 1930s depression in Germany.

The left has been tarred with the right wing's brush of "big government," due to the policies of liberals on the one hand and Stalinists on the other. But actually, with our commitment to self-determination and our struggle against the warfare and police state, revolutionaries have been the most consistent opponents of the massive repression functions of government. We now urgently need an activist movement that counters racist scape-goating by dramatically shining the floodlights on the real sources of the problems:

- The lion's share of public welfare that goes to the rich via staggering interest payments on government debt, bank bailouts, porkbarrel military contracts, etc.
- The unaccountable big bureaucracies of the transnational corporations, run by a handful of corporate executives who determine the life choices of the vast majority of people.
- The "STRUCTURAL ADJUSTMENT PROGRAMS" (SAPs) imposed by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund on over seventy third world countries. These are, in reality, draconian austerity measures designed to extract debt payment and cheap raw materials for the banks and industries of the North. The SAPS are the cutting edge for destroying human life and well-being in the world today.
- The growth of big government in its most virulent form prisons, police, military might, and the concomitant attacks on civil liberties.

The alternative has to be all about humane use of social resources, controlled by grassroots organizations within the oppressed communities. Early ACTUP and others efforts around AIDS in the gay community provided a positive example; the environmental racism movement in many third world communities is another very good example.

There is a lot of social activism going on, just not that much sense of a coherent or forceful overall movement. It seems that a big part of the challenge before us I really don't know how to do it is to find ways to connect the range of different oppressions, against our common enemy, imperialism, and to find ways to synthesize grassroots activism with a global consciousness and solidarity.

1956. The CIA overthrew democratic governments to replace them with repressive regimes more favorable to extraction of the wealth by United Fruit and Gulf Oil, respectively.

When I went to college at Columbia University, the most important experience for me was the opportunity to work in Harlem. In addition to the starkness of oppression there, I was deeply moved by the vitality of the culture and the spirit of resistance. People in Harlem certainly had a much more profound analysis of the social system than the political science professors at Columbia! That's what transformed me from a left-liberal who wanted to "uplift" the oppressed (to be more like me), to a radical who saw that oppressed people could run their own community far better than any outsider. The oppressed had to become the arbiters of their own destiny; self-determination was the key for moving all social change forward.

This new appreciation of self-determination, along with my earlier study of foreign policy, enabled me to be an early opponent of blood-soaked U.S. intervention in Vietnam. In March 1965, I founded and was the first chairperson of the Columbia Independent Committee Against the War In Vietnam. That work led me to the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), because I was looking for some group that combined antiwar work with antiracism, a belief in democracy, and at least a vague idea of socialism.

Organizing a successful demonstration or a teach-in was never my main goal. From the beginning, my concern was to find ways to keep building to the point where we could actually make a difference in overturning the injustices, toward changes that would actually affect people's lives. That impetus led me to search for a deeper analysis of the power structure we faced. In 1967, I wrote the first SDS pamphlet that defined the system as "U.S. imperialism," and that analysis was my threshold into the ensuing revolutionary period.

RnB: We hear all the time about people who were revolutionaries in the 1960s and who now have bought into white corporate America. What have been your experiences with this?

DG: There are, of course, those examples that the media have spotlighted. But most of the people that I know from the movements of the 1960s still try to find ways to implement the ideals of that period. Most are in human service areas like teaching or medicine or law. Beyond being "nicer" to their "clients" than most professionals, they are open to and looking for initiatives for empowerment from within the oppressed communities. Granted, only a precious few people of these individuals have been able to continue as full-time activists or have sustained a practice of confronting the power structure, but that shortcoming is more a problem of where we are all at collectively in the current period, in terms of building the type of movement we need.

peasantry. So the reality that China with all its monumental achievements moved in a bureaucratic, repressive, and capitalist direction is particularly telling.

There are a series of historic questions posed by today's crisis for the left or, more importantly, crisis for oppressed people: What is the world balance of forces between imperialism and national liberation? What level of economic development and/or international cooperation is a prerequisite for revolution to be viable? How can the internal dynamics toward state bureaucracy and/or capitalism be overcome? What will it take to build a revolutionary movement and effective solidarity within the imperial nations?

That was an awfully long response. To try to put it in a nutshell: The Soviet Bloc was neither socialist nor the main opposition to imperialism. Its collapse which followed in the wake of the setbacks to national liberation is most significant for the loss of vital aid to those movements. The real revolution and hope of the post-World War II era has been the rising of the most oppressed, the world's vast majority, in the third world. So the burning questions of the day involve what happened to those movements and what are the prospects for a new period of revolution.

RnB: Once you're in prison, does your political work end, or does "being a political prisoner" become your political work?

DG: It is most important to recognize that for those in the most repressive conditions like the federal control unit at Florence, Colorado, or on death row continuing to be a principled political person is in itself a victory. But for most of us, there are opportunities and a responsibility to continue active political work. Being a political prisoner is not just a status designation; it's a lifelong commitment to fight against injustice.

RnB: What has your political work been?

DG: From the beginning of my time in prison, I've tried to remain engaged with and contribute to the movement through political writings which usually got published in small-circulation, radical newspapers. From 1992 to 1997, I've also had the opportunity to write a regular book review column for New York City's Downtown magazine.

Living within an oppressed community, I've tried to continue a practice as a white antiracist. In particular, I've worked to expose, in order to put in check, the brutality and racism endemic to prisons. Unfortunately, I can't say that my efforts have been very successful.

On December 13, 1986, Kuwasi Balagoon my codefendant and a courageous Black Liberation Army warrior died in prison of AIDS. Ever since then, my main area of work has been AIDS in prison. It is by far the number one cause of death among New York State inmates, killing about

RnB: How did you respond to the charges of violence in your own case?

DG: During our trial, we were besieged by attacks on armed struggle of course from the mainstream but also, in various forms, from within the left. We felt embattled, and we in turn were very dogmatic in treating armed struggle as the principle rather than as one of the necessary means to fight to stop oppression. On a personal level, I regret that we weren't capable of expressing publicly a feeling of loss and pain for the families of the two officers and the guard who were killed. Even in a battle for a just cause, we can't lose our feeling for the human element. It's not like these three men were picked as targets for being especially heinous or conscious enforcers of the system. Rather, they just happened to be the representatives of the state's and banks' armed forces who responded on that day. So it must have felt like a completely senseless and bitter loss to their families. On our side, Mtayari Shabaka Sundiata was gunned down by police two days later, an irreparable loss of a committed and courageous BLA warrior.

The pain of the human losses, on both sides, is even more regrettable because of the serious political errors we made in how this action came down. I feel sorry for the losses and pain of the families of those who were killed. I feel also the pain to my own family, who never got to make choices about the risks I would take. And I feel self-critical for political mistakes and setbacks in the struggle against this criminal social system.

The cost of errors that are made in the course of armed struggle are very visible. It is a lot of responsibility. At the same time, it is a shame that the very grave errors of inaction, of not fighting hard enough, are rarely even noticed. What were the costs, in terms of violence, of the terrible passivity of most of the white left during the FBI and police campaigns of the 1960s and '70s, whose acts of annihilation against Black liberation resulted in the murder of dozens of Black activists and the decimation of the movement that had been the spearhead for social change in the U.S.? What was the toll from radicals' inaction while the FBI orchestrated the murders of sixty-nine AMERICAN INDIAN MOVEMENT (AIM) members and supporters around the Pine Ridge Reservation in the three years after the high tide of resistance there?

Please keep in mind, when discussing violence, how effectively the corporate media manipulates the most humane of emotions. Whenever enforcers of the system, or its allies, are hurt, we are presented, most vividly, with the human reality of their lives and the grieving of their families. But there is a terrible media silence about the far, far greater number of innocent victims of imperialist violence. They are not considered human beings; they are relegated to limbo, considered nonentities, by a media that simply presses the eras(, button on the video equipment.

Take Guatemala. I mentioned earlier that the CIA overthrew a democratically elected government there in 1956. Since then, according to international human rights organizations, tens of thousands of Guatemalan

sion [Butch Lee and Red Rover, Vagabond Press, NY, 1993] is a very useful book in jogging our minds out of the set categories from the 1960s and in beginning to look at the ways that people are pitted against each other today.

This situation is the exact opposite of Marx's hopeful projection that modern industry would put workers of all nations, genders, ages, and cultures into a very similar situation, thus laying the basis for common action. The increased fragmentation, competition, and culture clashes pose giant problems that we have got to address for achieving unity, or at least strategic alliances, among the oppressed and for achieving revolutionary consciousness.

RnB: Does the collapse of communism spell the end of revolutionary potential for this era?

DG: It has certainly been the most visible, dramatic turnaround, and it has contributed to the general sense of global decline of the left. But to me it is not at all the primary issue. Overwhelmingly the main problem has been the series of defeats since 1979 suffered by the national liberation movements in the third world. These movements mass-based uprisings of the most oppressed created the best hope for defeating imperialism and remaking the world on a humane basis. The Soviet Bloc countries, on the other hand, were never models of socialism; their progressive contribution in the post-World War II era was in the material aid they provided national liberation.

My critical view here is not some latter-day wisdom. A main reason we called ourselves the "new left" was to emphasize our break from the Soviet Bloc and the old-line Communist parties. Perhaps our stance was wrongly tinged with some of the anti-communism with which we were raised, but the main points of our critique were on target: Bureaucratic state control emphatically is not socialism, which instead means social and economic control by the working and oppressed classes themselves. That can only be accomplished through active and participatory democracy on all levels of society. Most of the East European countries had the contradiction in terms of "revolution from above." Even in Russia, where there was a real and heroic revolution based in the working class, they failed to bring the majority, the peasants, into the process. That was the basis for some of Stalin's worst atrocities.

This is not to say that the people in Eastern Europe are now better off with the fool's gold of "the free market." They are losing the highly developed version of the welfare state that was the most important internal achievement of the Soviet period. But the bureaucratic welfare state did not entail the popular participation and power that is essential to socialism.

The new left critique did not mean we saw the Soviet Bloc as a main enemy. Overwhelmingly the primary oppressor and destroyer of human life

Vietnamese and Black liberation. We also felt that such solidarity in practice was the cutting edge for building any truly revolutionary movement worthy of that name among white people.

You have to understand the context of the times; this wasn't some narrow conspiracy of a handful of people. In the context of powerful third world struggles, there was also a surging antiwar militancy among white youth: hundreds of Armed Forces ROTC buildings, military recruiting centers, and Bank of America branches were burnt to the ground. Hundreds of thousands of people participated in demonstrations that involved breaking windows at government buildings, or disrupting meetings of bigwigs, or resisting arrest. And there was a significant minority among the millions opposing the war who supported armed struggle. It was also a time when Vietnam offered a concrete example that U.S. imperialism could be defeated, especially if it was overextended by having to fight on many fronts.

RnB: Do you see armed struggle as a relevant strategy in the U.S. today?

DG: To me, the primary question isn't armed struggle per se, but rather the building of a strong anti-imperialist movement, or movements. That's what is most needed to move us forward. But it would be naive to build a serious movement without awareness that when this government feels threatened, it will attack. There is also the danger of the system's spawn (at times cooperating, and at other times contending), the armed right wing.

I don't think that it is wise for movement people to feel pushed into actions that they can't handle or sustain, based on elevating armed struggle to an abstract principle. On the other hand, given the nature of the forces we face, a serious movement has to pay some attention to building some ways to function clandestinely (ways of operating without being observed by the state) and toward the development of an armed capacity.

While I don't have much to say on strategy, I just want to add a quick note on armed self-defense, since that is the form that is most often seen as relevant and justified. It can be important, especially when it is done to help sustain mass struggle. But people also have to be aware of the strategic danger of being trapped in a static, defensive position where the government can bring in their overwhelming superiority of force. So a lot of the initial ways that armed struggle can help build the movement will instead require a guerrilla mentality looking for ways that the "propaganda of the deed" can help identify the enemy, show his potential vulnerabilities, embody our humanism, and encourage others to activism. But as I said, armed struggle is not the primary question now; building a strong anti-imperialist movement is.

RnB: Given some of your history, what are some of the achievements or errors of the anti-imperialist movement and its armed clandestine organizations that you participated in?

An Introduction

by Meg Starr, Resistance in Brooklyn [RnB]

The government and mainstream media have used their formidable powers to prevent real information about political prisoners Marilyn Buck, David Gilbert, Laura Whitehorn, and others from getting out. Small wonder. Like John Brown and those who stood with him, they are white people who took arms against the U.S. government, in solidarity with the oppressed. Invisible in the SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC or liberal histories of the 1960s is the logic of their progression from public to clandestine activism. These three interviewed here help us to understand an important part of radical history so often distorted. They stood accused of such “unthinkable crimes” as infiltrating the Klan, robbing money from banks and giving it to Black self-defense patrols, helping to liberate framed BLACK LIBERATION ARMY (BLA) leader ASSATA SHAKUR from prison, bombing the Capitol Building in response to the U.S. invasion of Grenada, and bombing the New York City Patrolmen’s Benevolent Association after the brutal murder of a Black grandmother by NYC Police. We hope that this pamphlet will help reintroduce these dedicated people to the movement and help us all with the ongoing task of figuring out the role of white radicals.

Many activists joining the progressive movement over the past ten years have participated in some form of work around prison issues: protesting the growth of the prison industry, exposing control unit torture, supporting social prisoners, or working with political prisoners. All of this is important. Agitating around prisons can expose the true nature of U.S. “democracy” to people, as well as alleviating prisoners’ daily suffering. The ways prison is used to control communities of color, all poor and working-class people, and women is a vital part of how the state keeps itself in power. Behind thought control in bourgeois democracy is the thinly gloved hand of repressive power.

The movements of the late ‘60s and ‘70s shook the U.S. government’s control over its domestic population. They were powerful because of their widespread support in oppressed communities and among white youth, their internationalism, their revolutionary vision, and the radical strategies many organizations used to confront the system, from civil disobedience to ARMED PROPAGANDA. Responding to this challenge, U.S. counterinsurgency used many repressive tactics, including incarceration, to destroy these movements. Many of the over one hundred POLITICAL PRISONERS and PRISONERS OF WAR (POWs) in U.S. jails were key leaders of the organizations they belonged to, leading national and local struggles for Black liberation, Puerto Rican independence, Native American sovereignty, and white antiwar and anti-imperialist action. Many of these prisoners became enemies of the state because they injected into the movements for social justice a most crucial element: revolutionary action.

The three interviews printed here in their complete and unedited (though separated) versions, grew out of discussions that we began with David Gilbert in 1995, and continued with Marilyn and Laura through 1996 and early '97. Looking at the lack of sympathetic yet critical review of the clandestine movements of the 1970s and '80s, coupled with various statements by individuals who essentially retracted their previous revolutionary positions, we agreed on the importance of a public dialogue to encourage debate about the processes and potential for change. Some among the white ANTI-IMPERIALIST prisoners still held true to their earlier convictions, despite changes, modification, or a growth of their viewpoints. After recognizing that due primarily to the logistical considerations of communication between prisoners and from one side of the wall to the other we could not publish commentary from all of those we would have liked to include, we narrowed the list of those to take part in this first booklet to three North Americans from varying but similar political backgrounds.

An important intention of this booklet is, in fact, to open a dialogue that we believe is essential to the growth of a more mature left. RnB strongly urges all those reading this who are moved to comment on a small or large part of the texts to write us their comments, for publication in a second, followup booklet. While we are especially anxious to hear from those behind the walls who participated in or led some of the movements described herein, we want the dialogue to be open to everyone concerned with a fair analysis of the periods in question and, most importantly, to everyone involved with building the revolutionary movements of tomorrow.

We can be reached c/o Meyer, WRL, 339 Lafayette Street, New York, NY 10012 or by email [mmmsrnb@igc.org].

We view this dialogue as the beginning of what we hope to be a broader discussion on strategies and tactics, past, present, and future. The struggle, indeed, continues.

Laura Whitehorn

During the Vietnam War, Laura Whitehorn organized 400 women in a take-over of the Harvard University administration buildings. In the 1970s, she worked with antiracist whites to defend Black communities from attack and helped found the Madame Binh Graphics Collective, a radical art group. She was accused of being a member of the Red Guerrilla Resistance, an anti-imperialist urban guerrilla group and served a twenty-three-year sentence for conspiracy to protest and alter government policies through the use of violence against government property. She was released in August of 1999.

RnB: Over the past years that you've been in prison since 1985 many changes have taken place in the world and in our movements. When you made your decision to take militant action, there was a sense of worldwide revolution on the rise. Now, although there are many trends of protest and

bring together a history of work in a broad range of struggles. We have been active in anti-imperialist work, including in Puerto Rican, Central American, African, and Black liberation solidarity movements; we've been involved in groups doing antimilitarist, antinuclear, anti-Klan, prisoner support, women's liberation, pro-feminist men's, AIDS, and lesbian and gay liberation work. We thus understand the tactical need for "single issue" or focused campaigns. We created RnB as a space where we could discuss and work around these struggles in an interconnected and holistic way.

With a strong consciousness of the power of white skin privilege, some of us have worked in primarily white groups under the leadership of people of color, while others of us have worked to build multiracial organizations. Currently, our membership is made up of European Americans. While RnB has not developed a principle of one or the other of these approaches, we do recognize the centrality that the social construction known as race plays in our work and lives. We are a group of women and men who struggle to promote feminism and women's leadership, to study the construct and meaning of gender, and respect the need for women-only space. We are queer, gay, straight, and bisexual people fighting for a world that understands and supports a diversity of sexualities and orientations, while challenging the heterosexist norms of society. Some of us have been most strongly influenced by Marxism, others by anarchism, all by at least a little of both. One of our hopes is to learn from the strengths of both ideologies, honoring the Red and the Black.

In an effort to learn from the mistakes and successes of the left and from our own past work, we have tried to remain open to a range of approaches, ideologies, and contributions. Responding to the current period, we have tried to hold on to the principles that have guided OUR lives, while reevaluating those past assumptions that have proven faulty in today's changing world. Though we do not have a set policy on internal process, we use consensus to arrive at most of our decisions. We value our differences rather than legislate them away. We spend time supporting one another personally as well as politically, believing not only in the theoretical interconnectedness of the two, but also in the practical strength gained by being in a group where comrades are also friends.

For a copy of our complete Principles of Unity, to get on our mailing list for upcoming events, or to comment on or write for the followup booklet to this volume, please write to us at Meyer, c/o WRL, 339 Lafayette Street, NY, 10012, or email us at mmmsrnb@igc.org

A frank discussion of past movements, their victories and errors, and the current political climate for revolutionary struggle within the USA. With EuroAmerican anti-imperialist political prisoners David Gilbert, Marilyn Buck, and Laura Whitehorn [released).

I point to these examples to suggest that our fundamental concepts and principles of solidarity our commitments to anti-imperialism and to taking direct action remain true and relevant to this day. Right now I'm not even especially talking about armed actions. While strategic concepts (such as the relationship between armed struggle and mass action) may change as history itself develops, I believe that it's a serious mistake to abandon our basic goals and politics. Our resistance and analysis led us to a commitment of fight-back on all levels including armed struggle.

RnB: Looking back over your own personal and political history, how did you first become politically aware and active? How and why did it lead you in an anti-imperialist direction?

LW: I became politically aware over a period of time beginning with my childhood, when McCarthyism and segregation forced me to look at the serious injustices in the world. As a Jewish kid born in 1945, I was raised to hate prejudice. My parents also hoped that I would learn to fear the repression that would surely follow any resistance.

The civil rights movement forced me to abandon that fear, because I witnessed the courage of Black women, men, and children in the U.S. South. My first political actions as a high school and college student were against segregation and for voting rights. As the war in Vietnam exploded, I began to join petition drives, marches, and rallies against the U.S. invasion.

I felt passionately about those issues. Some of this was motivated by my own deep sense of unfairness, regarding how I was treated as a woman in sexist U.S. society. This helped me to identify with others affected by injustice. Though I didn't yet identify myself as a lesbian, I certainly did rebel against many of the roles I was supposed to be happy in, even as a child.

The world events of 1968 and 1969 enabled me to make the leap from a belief that democracy simply wasn't working as it was supposed to work, to a more critical anti-imperialist viewpoint. I was deeply affected by the emergence of the BLACK PANTHER PARTY (BPP), the rise of the national liberation struggles, CHE GUEVERA'S speech outlining the strategy of "Two, Three, Many Vietnams," and my own participation in a series of confrontations with the Chicago police department. This first confrontation at the 1968 Democratic Convention made it graphically clear that liberals shniberals, and the whole Democratic Party was part of the ruling class, hiding behind the violence of the Chicago cops as they beat and gassed unarmed demonstrators.

As I supported the BPP and YOUNG LORDS PARTY in Chicago, I experienced the untrammelled violence of the pigs against Black and Puerto Rican people. Even more importantly, I experienced the courage and massive desire of those communities to fight back and take control over their lives to refuse to collapse under the terror of the cops. I was present

PRISONERS OF WAR: a status chosen by some political prisoners to designate that they are in prison for waging war on an oppressive government; usually, but not always, self-designated by armed combatants from colonized peoples, according to United Nations rules allowing such status.

PUERTO RICAN ARMED FORCES OF NATIONAL LIBERATION (FALN): an armed, underground collective of revolutionary Puerto Ricans living on the U.S. mainland that bombed government, military and corporate buildings from 1974 to 1983 as part of its strategy to contribute to a people's war to win independence and socialism for Puerto Rico. Many of the currently incarcerated Puerto Rican political prisoners and prisoners of war were associated with the F.A.L.N., or with the Macheteros. Amnesty campaigns for their release include the Puerto Rican Human Rights Campaign, 8 Rodriguex Serra Street, San Juan, PR 00907, and the National Committee to Free Puerto Rican Political Prisoners and Prisoners of War, 2607 West Division, Chicago, IL 60622.

LA RAZA: Spanish for "the race" name of a movement and a political party of progressive Chicanos/Mexicanos in the Southwestern U.S., began in the late 60s and still existing today.

RED ARMY FACTION (RAF): a network of armed, clandestine revolutionary collectives that operated in West Germany from the late 1970s until the early 1990s, bombing government, military and corporate targets, as part of building a militant anti-imperialist movement.

REVOLUTIONARY ACTION MOVEMENT (RAM): a revolutionary aboveground organization of Black nationalists in the U.S. inspired by the politics of Malcolm X, operated from around 1965 to 1968.

ASSATA SHAKUR: woman activist in the Black Panther Party forced underground by FBI harassment in 19701 became a leader of the Black Liberation Army; wounded when arrested in New Jersey in 1973; acquitted of numerous false charges of BLA bank robberies; convicted of a frame-up charge of murdering one of the arresting cops; freed by a BLA breakout in 1979; fled to Cuba, where she lives today after being granted political refugee status. The Hands Off Assata Campaign, aimed at countering recent attacks on her freedom, is based at PO Box 650, New York, NY 10009.

SIMI VALLEY TRIAL: the 1992 trial of cops charged with beating Black motorist Rodney King, which led to their acquittal.

SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC: adherents of social democracy, an ideological position that, while claiming allegiance to socialism, aims to simply reform capitalism to expand its welfare benefits, limit corporate power and enhance labor power.

Taking powerful action against the oppressor had a liberating quality that affected my view of how all of us can free ourselves. As a woman and a lesbian, the desire to fight against sexism and homophobia fueled my desire to wage armed struggle against all aspects of this oppressive society. As a revolutionary, I seek to change the entire system, not just one or two parts of it.

RnB: We hear all the time about people who were revolutionaries in the 1960s and who now have bought into white corporate America. What have been your experiences with this?

LW: I don't have much experience with this, but it seems to me that it underlines the fact that white people in particular can almost always "sell out" by falling back on our white skin privilege. The system just loves to welcome back its strays.

I also think that individualism and greed are so strong in U.S. capitalism that they continue to erode the character and values of people including those who try to make social change, be revolutionaries, or participate in struggles for justice. I guess when things get hard, it's tempting for some to jump ship and find a comfortable niche in what looks like the winning side. How boring! And how soul destroying.

RnB: Some movement activists have expressed the idea that violence cannot be justified for any reason, and even a few political prisoners have said that they were wrong to engage in violent acts. What are your feelings on this? How have they changed over the years?

LW: Whenever we talk about "violence," I think it's important first to distinguish between the violence of the state including the army, the police, etc. and the use of armed resistance and armed struggle by oppressed people struggling for justice. Remember, too, that imperialist violence isn't just what they do with arms it also includes the genocidal results of a system that tries to destroy the history, identity, and culture of the nations it colonizes. It's malnutrition, poverty, and homelessness in the streets of the richest country on earth. Is the death of a homeless person, frozen in the winter streets of Chicago or New York, not a death by violence? If U.S. imperialism were to disarm to stop their stealing from people, cease committing genocide, stop starving people, etc. then I'd be willing to consider changing my support of revolutionary violence. Malcolm X talked about this a lot, with great passion and insight. "What are your options," he asked, "when a man's got his foot on your neck?"

I do believe that revolutionary forces need to be extremely careful when using any kind of violence. Armed struggle does confer power on those engaging in it, and I think revolutionaries have a responsibility to act with principle and care. We must show respect for the value of human life in a way that the imperialists can only pretend to do. During the late 1960s, when the level of struggle in this country was so high, I think I tended

CHE GUEVARA: a leader of the 1959 Cuban Revolution, later a Cuba economics minister, and finally a theoretician and fighter/leader with several guerrilla movements against U.S. dominated repressive regimes in Africa and Latin America, killed by CIA agents while fighting in Bolivia in 1967.

CHRISTIAN BASE COMMUNITIES: specially designed towns in various Latin American countries set up by followers of Christian "liberation theology" the philosophy that Christianity should be focused on freedom of the poor from oppression; involved various self-help projects and nonviolent forms of resistance against militaristic regimes of the rich.

COMMITTEE IN SOLIDARITY WITH THE PEOPLE OF EL SALVADOR (CISPES): a nationwide U.S. progressive group, established in 1980, that organized opposition to the U.S. war against the Salvadorean revolution (until the 1992 negotiated settlement) and political and financial support for the leading liberation movement, the FMLN (Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front).

COUNTER INTELLIGENCE PROGRAM (COINTELPRO): an FBI program formally run from 1956 to 1971, whose aim was to "neutralize, misdirect and destroy" radical-left and progressive movements in the U.S. Heaviest emphasis in the 1960s was on Black Liberation Movement, which endured forged divisive letters, violence practicing agents, office burglaries, phone/mail surveillance, police harassment, police assassinations, and frame-up criminal charges, among other tactics. Exposed in an FBI office break-in by radicals in 1971, thereafter formally "discontinued," but actually continued under other names up til today.

DAVE DELLINGER: a longtime pacifist revolutionary North American and former political prisoner who has committed frequent civil disobedience, beginning with resisting military participation in World War II. A member of the Chicago Eight grouping charged with conspiracy to riot at the infamous 1968 Democratic National Convention, Dellinger was the chief architect of the major coalitions against the war in Southeast Asia.

DEMOCRATIC CENTRALISM: a theory developed by Lenin which says that a communist party should be directed internally by majority vote taken during periodic congresses. These votes on strategy, basic positions and rules govern the political direction of the party. Day to day operations are taken by a central committee based on the strategy, positions and rules approved at the congress. Party members are free to advocate positions different from the party's position internal to the party but when they represent the party (externally) only advocate decisions that have been taken by the party. On any essential matter or position once a vote is taken, the whole membership must espouse and follow the "party line" that has been decided.

W.E.B. DuBois: Black writer, intellectual and communist activist who

I think that the emergence of the Black Panther Party and armed organizations within the Black Nation played a particular role for me, too, because I'd hated racism so passionately but had felt powerless to make any real change. The prospect of armed self-defense and armed struggle for Black liberation directly motivated me to take up armed struggle myself, because it seemed clear to me (and still does) that racism won't be eradicated without political power Black Power. And power won't be won without armed struggle.

When I began doing solidarity work with Puerto Rico in the mid-1970s, my understanding of the need for armed struggle was extended, because Puerto Rico was so clearly a nation directly colonized by the U.S. It was also a nation that had been engaged in a struggle for independence with many periods that included armed warfare and armed struggle. When the PUERTO RICAN ARMED FORCES OF NATIONAL LIBERATION (FALN) began doing actions in the 1970s at the same time that I was involved in Puerto Rico solidarity work, especially the struggle to free the Nationalist prisoners it gave me hope for the future. Those actions gave an idea of what would be necessary.

RnB: Do you see armed struggle as a relevant strategy in the U.S. today?

LW: Yes, I don't think armed struggle is ever an irrelevant form of struggle although it may take more or less prominence at different points in history. I'm reminded of something I was told by members of the Vietnam Women's Union during a trip there in 1975, right after the victory. They told of how hopeless the situation looked under the French especially following the burning of the rice crop in the 1930s. Peasants felt there was no chance of ever winning anything. It wasn't a good time to try to organize people into the Viet Minh resistance, because of the fear. In one village, cadres of the party worked to organize the peasants to beat drums at night something that the French occupiers outlawed. An elaborate plan was made for people to beat drums in various homes and in the rice fields, forcing the French soldiers to spend an entire night searching for one offender after another. At the end of the night, the soldiers withdrew, exhausted, to the rattattat of yet another drum!

The point was that the village had gained courage and hope from the activity, leading eventually to an example of how armed actions could be carried out if there was a lot of cooperation and strategic planning. When the drumbeats were replaced by arms, the French were decisively driven out of one village after another.

Of course, in that example the goal of the people was clear and united. I don't mean to make a simplistic analogy, but I do think that armed actions and the building for them can play a role a different kind of role in different periods. For example, I would have cheered (and I think lots of people would have) if there'd been some small actions against the Los Angeles Police Department after the Simi Valley verdict in the case of the beating

A strategy to rebuild and provide a basis for advancing forward with a radical vision of ending this brutal system is not easy. We already have learned about U.S. imperialism's ability to regroup after its own losses and setbacks (the loss of the war in Vietnam, the inability to reclaim Cuba for example). We know how the State disables national liberation and class struggle internally using white supremacy, bribery and cooptation, force, COINTELPRO, assassination, and low-intensity warfare. We have definitely learned a lot in this century. These lessons should be used, to empower us, not to make us more scared of fighting back, not to make us backtrack into reformism or accommodationism. When one is white in this society, there is always something to lose. Rejecting one's white privilege for the sake of a realizable potential that is not yet experienced is hard, but definitely worth struggling for. We need to fight the growing intellectual/psychological construct that reasserts and reinforces the inferiority of non-European peoples and justifies barbarism and genocide. Let's not forget how the architects of fascism in Spain, Italy, and Germany created an enemy.

To even embark on a strategy of rebuilding and realization to renew a liberating vision of justice and human rights we must be clear about the strengths of state power and be prepared to defend ourselves against that power. The repressive apparatus is powerful, with its fingers stretched into every crevice or crack in the state's hegemony it can find. In Europe the resistance was initiated against fascist states. In both France but particularly in Italy, those groups led in large part by radical and revolutionary forces had the potential to claim state power in favor of the masses of people. In Yugoslavia, Tito and the resistance did succeed and created a society much more beneficial to all its members than are the fragments of that society today. If no such consciousness of these forms of struggle exist or develop soon, then I think the potential to advance will be severely compromised.

People fought back against European fascism. People worked in clandestine movements. Would the imperialist big-bang war have ended German and Italian fascism and aggression without the internal resistance movements that were led in large part by anti-capitalist forces? Think about that! Or think how many more people would have been massacred... We need the capacity for, understanding of, and willingness to resist and use whatever means necessary to stand for justice, human dignity, and liberation and against national oppression, white supremacy, class exploitation, and the oppression of women and of gay people. Without this, there will be no forward-moving change in the conditions of existence for the vast majority of the peoples, at least not here in the U.S.

I do not believe that there will be forward moving change in this country without both changing the system and dismantling this nation's state as an oppressor nation. I also believe this struggle can only succeed if led by oppressed peoples and nations. How we as progressive, radical, or revolutionary white people relate to the objective, material conditions of struggle will in large part define our historical ability to play a role in making the changes necessary to open the way to liberation and justice for all

That is our responsibility and our challenge.

Congress and from the struggles his speech represented. To paraphrase his message: "Create Two, Three, Many Vietnams" ultimately defeating the system of U.S. led imperialism by freeing the colonies (or oppressed nations) whose land, labor, and resources provide the lifeblood of that system.

We analyzed imperialism as a global system the highest stage of capitalism rather than as simply being the foreign policy of capitalism. We understood imperialism as the same system functioning inside the U.S. as well as throughout the world a very important point because it led us to focus on building solidarity with the national liberation struggles inside the U.S. Support for self-determination of the "internal colonies" the New Afrikan or Black nation, Native American nations, the Mexican nation, and Puerto Rico became a central issue in all of our work. The national liberation struggles themselves had consistently argued for this position within the broader progressive movement.

We were internationalists, meaning that we supported all anti-imperialist struggles around the world. We also accepted the particular responsibility to support those nations directly colonized and oppressed by our own government. We were (still are!) working for socialist revolution.

North American (or predominantly white) anti-imperialist groups embraced the view that alongside the oppressed nations inside the U.S. there exists an oppressor nation, made up of white people of all classes and organized by the power of white supremacy to function as part of any ruling-class strategy. White people, we believe, need to make a conscious decision and to take explicit action to ally with the oppressed instead of the oppressor. As members of that oppressor nation, we tried to analyze the affects of white skin privilege on us and on our organizations, as well as to remain aware of the effects on the oppressed nations.

One of our main achievements was to recognize that white supremacy is an institutionalized system, in contrast to the more accepted view that racism is just a matter of bad ideas and attitudes. This gave us a different viewpoint from which to fight white supremacy on its many levels. These included education, agitation, demonstrations, campaigns, confrontations, and clandestine activities. In a variety of cities and over quite a number of years, many revolutionary anti-imperialists established a strong practice of work, including: fighting the Ku Klux Klan and other right-wing organizations, defending Black and Mexican communities under attack, supporting Black and Puerto Rican prisoners, exposing right-wing groups, building campaigns against racist killer cops and Klan in the police forces, etc. We also established material aid campaigns and clandestine support work for national liberation movements inside and outside the U.S. borders.

Our understanding of the importance of fighting white supremacy and supporting the Puerto Rican and Black liberation struggles also led us to support prison struggles. We initiated projects in solidarity with political

I am also a strong advocate to free political prisoners/POWs and also to take on the U.S. prison plantation system. Being a political prisoner is not my only work. I think it is wasteful and shortsighted to relegate political prisoners to only working around themselves. Just because we are prisoners does not mean that we have lost our reasoning analytical powers. We still have a world views based on long years of experience. Too many, even in our political movements would prefer to relegate us to museum pieces, objects of campaigns perhaps, but not political subjects and comrades in an ongoing political struggle against imperialism, oppression, and exploitation. The state tries to isolate us, true; that makes it all the more important not to let it succeed in its proposition. We fight for political identity and association from here; it is important that political forces on the outside not lose sight of why the state wants to isolate and destroy us, and therefore fight to include us in political life ideological struggle, etc. In many struggles many militants have been exiled yet they have still been considered part of their struggles, not merely objects. We, we here, could be considered internally exiled. Don't lock us into roles as objects or symbols.

RnB: What do you think are the most urgent situations facing political prisoners in the U.S. today?

MB: The most urgent issues in the U.S. are not exclusive to political prisoners. While we may be in the most repressive conditions, the degree of repression correlates to the overall condition of society. Our issues are extreme versions of yours. There are several aspects of the U.S. situation that are most critical: white supremacy and racial, genocidal oppression; fascism; and the brutal face of capitalism. The in-your-face contempt for human beings is alarming.

Prisons are being built and overfilled. Fascism is upon us; folks do not seem to understand that the rise of the prison economy is central to that. The propaganda and pseudo-science prepares folks to believe and accept that whole sectors are born to be criminals and therefore undeserving of social programs, much less human rights. Money is being made off the commodification of the "prison class." If one believes that the state of a society's prisons reflects the state of the society, then the clamor for more inhumane treatment of prisoners only reinforces what is the current of society as a whole.

But yes, we do have urgent problems increasing repression most cruelly expressed in the control units, special housing units, etc. ripping away the full civil and human rights we have, squeezing every penny possible from us (and our families, friends, comrades) as well as our labor. The conditions are deteriorating rapidly. Cruelty has been unleashed full force. Most of the U.S. political prisoners have walked through hell for more than 10 years now, some for 25 years or more. It is getting worse. I guess one could say that the most urgent situations facing us are those of staying alive, maintaining our political and social identities. We need more support * However, I see many folks leaving political prisoner work to the side as if it

any white people and the state. In the groups we've been part of, our level of militancy and armed struggle has been determined by the level of confrontation between the national struggles and the state.

A big problem of our work was our inability to organize larger numbers of white people to work with us. While many people over the years attended activities and actions that we held, our standards of commitment were so stringent that people wouldn't join our groups. Internally, our misuses of "criticism/selfcriticism" and our strict methods of leadership served to weaken rather than to strengthen members. These methods also militated against wider recruitment. A revolutionary organization should build its members, becoming stronger in the process. Our sectarian approach to relations with other North American leftists also damaged our work on many levels.

On an ideological level, we weren't able to resolve the relationship between the two poles of our politics: the contradictions between imperialism and the oppressed nations and the contradictions within the oppressor nation as a whole. For one thing, we never developed a thoroughgoing class analysis, nor a practice in workplace or community organizing. We didn't think that there could be legitimate or progressive struggles that go on in oppressor nation communities—for example, struggles for reproductive rights or against domestic violence—so we never created programs or practice to relate to such struggles. This gave much of our work an impermanent, transitory quality, as well as a limited (petitbourgeois) class character.

Many of these clashes of achievement and error played out in our politics and practice on women's liberation. Most of our group's members were women, and lots of us were lesbians. In the armed groups, women were fighters and leaders. We were organized and inspired by the examples of Vietnam and other national liberation movements, where women played leading roles and women's liberation was fought for by women combatants in the stage of winning national independence. But we were confused as to what these lessons meant when transferred from the context of an oppressed nation to our own situation.

Our analysis was that as women, we wouldn't win our liberation separate from defeating imperialism and transforming the structures of society toward a more collective, socialist model. We rejected as reformist the struggles for "equal rights" in a capitalist context and defined women's liberation as requiring a revolutionary confrontation with institutionalized male supremacy—a socialist revolution. Women in developing socialist countries had confronted the harsh reality that the institutions and social attitudes of male supremacy did not automatically disappear with the victory of national liberation. Women have had to continue to struggle for their rights and to redefine their roles long after liberation has been won.

Despite these theoretical understandings, we were unable to develop concrete strategies to organize women of the oppressor nation beyond soli-

stark national oppression, white supremacist ideology, and how it all plays out in the consummate institution of repression.

In this post-Vietnam war period (the postcolonial—now neocolonial—period), the imperialist states in concert with their financial bourgeois masters and cohorts have regrouped and redeployed their forces. Because they have to scramble harder than ever for profits, control of resources, and markets worldwide, the silk gloves have been stripped off to free up the iron fist to grab more voraciously. Working people worldwide are forced into worse conditions than ever before. Here prisons have become the vehicle of cultural and national genocide and, perhaps as importantly, a new "captive" market and cheap labor force. The nearest institution to slavery—but a kind in which to live, we must pay to be enslaved! Being in prison makes me understand, every single repressive day, how dehumanizing, cruel, and avaricious imperialism is. I am a more staunch anti-imperialist than ever.

I've learned much from the disarticulation of the socialist camp. Socialism can not develop and maintain [itself] very well in one country, certainly, not when it is under attack by imperialism and international finance capital. Cuba is the strongest example remaining of what is possible under socialism; they have not lost the war. (And we all need to support them in their resistance and battle to not be washed back into the sea of capitalist corruption and imperial domination.) We have also learned how socialist principles can be corrupted. We have learned that war of national liberation does not ensure liberation from the masses of capitalist exploitation, male domination, racial discrimination or homophobia.

Che Guevara was a visionary when he talked about the necessity to build the "socialist man" and woman. Women have found in liberation wars from Vietnam to Zimbabwe, have made gains in the former "socialist" bloc, and have been beat back (and betrayed). National liberation and socialism in and of themselves have not ensured our liberation as women; because in the main, we women in struggle have believed that these struggles and projects would naturally include our liberation. So we have become more strategic, more determined that we must be equal in revolutionary struggles. We cannot be token, or lulled into standing aside. I believe more than ever that if we want to rebuild the forces for revolution and social change, women must assume more ideological and active leadership. Our brothers, if they truly want to see revolutionary change, need to wake up. Liberation cannot be truly achieved off of anyone else's back.

Finally, regarding the U.S. in particular. We face a century of true barbarism, more pronounced than this one in which we have at least glimpsed the potential for liberation and justice... unless and until white people who do argue for liberation, justice, and human rights take on white supremacy and do active battle against racism and genocide. This means supporting the oppressed and colonized nations' right to self-determination and independence—Puerto Rico, the New African/Black nation, Native Ameri-

A major ideological error made by many of us in the revolutionary anti-imperialist tendency was to view armed struggle as a strategy in and of itself. We adopted this concept out of context from the Puerto Rican Independence Movement, where the position was used at a certain moment for a certain purpose. In part, we tried to argue for a model of people's war at a time when there was debate over the use of armed struggle. We argued that all efforts and resources should focus on building the armed clandestine level of struggle. This argument ended up weakening and ultimately dismantling the critical areas of mass work and public organization that had been developed. Within the clandestine groups themselves, it meant that we emphasized taking action over building infrastructure and organizing.

While we said we rejected focoism or small group strategies, for generating revolutionary activity we in fact developed a small group structure. We became more and more internalized and isolated. Along with significant errors in our analysis of the political conditions of the 1980s regarding the state and the forces of repression this contributed to the eventual arrest and destruction of our group.

These reflections are all very abbreviated and partial. Questions of political strategy are important to look at historically, for the future of our struggle for liberation and justice inside the U.S. At some point, this history needs to be more fully examined. We feel it's important to begin the discussion, so that neither the advances nor the errors are left to be defined by the government or by bourgeois political historians. The role of resistance and armed struggle must not be lost in these fragmented, reactionary, and sometimes dispirited times.

RnB: How have your years in prison and the changes in the world over these past years affected how you view and understand the systems of imperialism and oppression?

LW: Being in prison has only reaffirmed my understanding of how imperialism operates: the painful cost it extracts from its oppressed subjects and the inextricable relationship between the system as a whole and white supremacy in particular (not to mention sexism). Being in prison has also awakened me to (the isolation and elitism of a lot of the left at least the white left. Prisoners understand so much of what the system is and how it works, while the left often talks and acts like they're the only ones who understand anything. In addition, the language and organizing strategies of the left have so often been overly intellectual and removed from the actual practice of people's lives.

In terms of world changes, I like most other leftists was floored by the Sandinista electoral defeat and by the crumbling of the bureaucratic "socialist" states. I often think about how much joy I took from the part of Lenin's Imperialism where he says that opportunism won't hold sway in the working class of any imperialist power for as long as it has in the English working class. Or about how we embraced Lenin's view of the crumbling

This was our generation's moment. A time when even those of us from the oppressor nation could step forward to call capitalism and imperialism for what they were and continue to be the oppressor of humanity. We joined the tide of humanity to throw off the chains of our own role in the white privileged oppressor state and stand side by side in a class and national liberation's struggle.

Liberation and justice benefit everyone, including those of the oppressor nation. Perhaps it does not look like it on the face of it, but to live in a society defined by injustice, cruelty, genocide, violence, and exploitation can only crush the spirit and inevitably, as it has now happened, create such a deformed, decadent society that the dominant social manifestation is fear and mental illness.

I still believe we can live in a different kind of society where we all contribute according to our ability but share according to our needs, where there exists an equality among peoples and nations, regardless of skin color, language, culture, sex, or sexual orientation. Nevertheless, we now live in a moment when revolutionary momentum has been set back gravely and the forces of totalitarian fascism and capitalist greed are prevailing. Therefore, it is crucial to analyze how to rebuild the forces of liberation and justice. We must not succumb to defeat, but learn from that defeat and breathe strength and endurance back to our march forward to justice and peace.

Despite all the setbacks, the increasing genocide, and commiseration of the vast majority, we are a step ahead of where we were. We have experiences, glimpses of the possibilities we did not have thirty years ago. I hear many folk bemoan the corruption of the Vietnamese economic relations, saying in the end, they are lost. But imagine, what would Vietnam be like today had they lost the war to the U.S. in the '70s? Where would the Cuban people be if they had capitulated to U.S. imperialism? Or where would young people in the U.S. today who experience the losses, the increasing exploitation, marginalization, the racial genocide, be if there were not the experience of the Black Panther Party, the REVOLUTIONARY ACTION MOVEMENT (RAM), the American Indian Movement, Students for a Democratic Society, LA RAZA, the Puerto Rican nationalists, and all the clandestine resistance organizations and we, the political prisoners, who survived even though buried alive in these prison camps?

RnB: Do you see armed struggle as a relevant strategy in the U.S. today?

MB: I'm not sure what the most relevant strategy is today.

A focoist strategy will not likely work it worked only in very particular circumstances. In the concept of people's war, advanced throughout the Chinese revolution and Vietnamese liberation war, popular forces must first be organized and mobilized before an armed strategy can seriously begin, again in particular circumstances. Urban guerrilla warfare? Well, the base does not exist, and it certainly was smashed in the '60s and '70s. Armed

support of other political prisoners and POWs, like working on the art show and campaign to free Black political prisoner Mumia Abu Jamal. I try to conduct myself in prison according to principles of revolutionary morality, and I try to draw, write, and whatever I can do to help people on the outside know who political prisoners and POWs are. Part of this, of course, involves explaining to other prisoners why I'm a political prisoner.

The second area has taken many forms for me, the simplest being individual aid like legal help to women trying to deal with their and their children's situation. A more complex aspect of this is being part of resistance inside whether as a member of an ongoing group representing prisoners' interests (which was possible for the year I was in Baltimore City jail) or through more clandestine organizing (like at the federal prison in Lexington, KY), where those who would plot and plan knew how to find one another. Organizing resistance in prison is like doing it any place else, only harder because of the extreme repression. The process that people go through to reach a point of willingness to resist is much the same. One of the happiest moments I've had in prison was when I was part of a resistance (a.k.a. riot) against racist cop brutality at Lexington. That act of rebellion joined by well over 100 women was like a momentary taste of freedom. Fighting injustices within the prison system involves: in particular, fighting racism from the staff and the institution but also among prisoners themselves. Working on and supporting Black History Month is an important part of this every year; it's always under attack.

Finally, AIDS work is something I've done ever since the years I spent in the DC jail, watching women die of AIDS-related infections while no one would even consider that women could get HIV I've been active in AIDS counseling and education groups at Lexington, Marianna and here at Pleasanton. This is not static work it involves all kinds of activism, confrontation, as well as education and support. Through this work, I've felt very connected to AIDS activists on the street, both to the individuals who have sent videos and literature and arranged for speakers and to the militants who have demonstrated against the government and given people with AIDS (PWAS) in prison a sense of power, of not being alone. This work is one of the few places in prison where I can politicize being a lesbian, in a collective situation. Dealing with the issue of women and AIDS involves fighting genocide as well as racism and sexism. AIDS especially decimates third world communities, where women are infected at high rates. One of the most discouraging things I've seen about the progressive communities on the outside is the utter inattention by the white feminist movement or what still exists of such a movement to the issue of women and AIDS. It seems to me there should be a visible, ongoing battle against AIDS by the feminist movement but nothing like that is apparent in any of the feminist publications I see.

RnB: What do you think are the most urgent situations facing political prisoners in the U.S. today?

is cynicism, despair, defeat, and self-protectiveness and, of course, that monster, "fear." A whole generation has grown up under such conditions.

I think about Bertolt Brecht's observation: There are those who struggle for a day and they are good. There are those who struggle for a year and they are better. There are those who struggle years and they are very good. But there are those who struggle all their lives, and they are the indispensable ones.

RnB: Some movement activists have expressed the idea that violence cannot be justified for any reason, and even a few political prisoners have said that they were wrong to engage in violent acts. What are your feelings on this? How have they changed over the years?

MB: Violence cannot be justified for any reason... Does that mean that an individual or group or nation cannot justify defending themselves when they are beaten down, murdered, starved, worked to death?

Without resistance to the evils of oppression and exploitation, colonialism would still be in full force worldwide, women would be beaten and murdered with impunity, chattel slavery would be the order of the day. Resistance and violence from the oppressed can never weigh heavier than that of the rulers and state power! Should Nat Turner, Harriet Tubman, Emiliano Zapata, Ho Chi Minh, Sitting Bull be dismissed as heroes of the oppressed because they fought?

Even bourgeois law recognized the right to self-defense. The Nuremberg Conventions written after World War II state that citizens have a moral obligation to resist immoral and genocidal governments. I think many people have lost a sense of perspective a view of justice; they are intellectually and emotionally caught up in a false dichotomy successfully constructed by U.S. state power: everything that is active may be considered as violence unless carried out or condemned by the state itself; state violence equals the natural order of things, bestowed by power. (The state exists to ensure that the ruling owner class maintains power and control over all other classes.) In particular, political responses are criminalized, demonized. We should not allow ourselves to get caught up in government-speak. The whole hysteria over violence is whipped up to divert from the real issues of power who has it and is therefore permitted to use it against those who do not.

This society is plunged into an orgy of senseless violence. It is promoted in TV, radio, movies, sports. This is truly horrifying, particularly because it is so well orchestrated and promoted by the state. Again, such violence is diversionary; to make the violence of poverty, white supremacy, against women and gay people, and of capitalist exploitation seem acceptable, natural. It is abhorrent to me not to challenge and resist such forces of death. If I did not resist, would I not be condoning state violence and terrorism? Wouldn't you?

LW: I've pretty much answered as much as I can of this in my responses to other questions. My view of the world outside is pieced together, though it's probably not much more inaccurate than the view some folks on the outside get, depending on their particular conditions. But I don't feel really confident about my ability to say much about a direction for "movement-building" work.

I do think that it's a little off to talk about building a movement. I think a movement gets built by massive response to concrete conditions, not by the urging of organizers. What I think organizers can do is to lay the basis for what may become a movement, by the steady raising of issues or by smaller projects of practice. The Mumia campaign is an example albeit an unusual one. A small number of dedicated people produced videos, articles, etc. about Mumia and made it possible for Mumia himself to have access to print and broadcast media for his writings. When the death order was signed, people in the U.S. and across the planet responded and the information was available. Then a variety of groups got built up to carry out the work and hopefully to continue it after the mass outcry died down following the stay.

It seems like projects dealing with racism, anti-immigration xenophobia, and the like are important at this time. When larger numbers of people respond to something, there needs to be an infrastructure to back the response up with. I think that this is especially true in a reactionary time like the present, when everyone is scrambling to survive and we know the tidal wave hasn't even hit yet.

As for armed struggle or even just creative militancy, I still think it has a role to play. It's especially necessary when there's a response to some particular outrage by the cops or any other arm of the state like the beating of Rodney King, for just one well-known example. But here, too, there needs to be some preparation, something available to be called on. That's why I think revolutionaries shouldn't be strictly reacting to current events all the time, or giving up various forms of struggle or even analyses and words because of the mood of the moment. An example here would be to stop talking about or organizing against imperialism because it's not "popularly recognized" at the moment. I don't think the lesson of our past is that we used too many forms of struggle, but rather that we misordered them, making armed struggle the primary one in the early 1980s, when it should have played a more minor role.

We used too few forms of struggle, as in not having seen the importance of the struggles in Central America. We failed to work in support of the mass demonstrations and other forms that the antiwar and anti-intervention movements took. I think it would be a serious mistake now to reach the opposite conclusion and renounce armed struggle and other more militant forms of struggle simply because this is a reactionary period.

So even when the war in Vietnam escalated in 1965, I still did not protest. My awareness had not gone beyond my own subjective white, middle-class, female reality. Then, in college, I did transcend that subjective isolation. There was a lot of social and political ferment. I was skeptical that sit-ins and moral outrage could end the war. But more militant sectors were rallying. When the Black Power movement emerged from the civil rights movement, raising questions of power, I was vitalized, yanked up out of my chair of skepticism and alienation, and moved to activism. Of course that also meant having to learn about and understand power and the system imperialism, colonialism, white supremacy, male supremacy, capitalist exploitation. The Black Power movement gave me the tools to put in perspective my own oppression as a woman in relation to issues of national oppression and class exploitation. It also i I so challenged my complacency as a good white person who does no harm to others, but also had not confronted the haters and murderers the state, the Klan, etc. I had not acted! I joined SDS, an activist, vital student organization at that time (1967). The concept of participatory democracy for all people motivated me. So did socialism. I also began learning more about national liberation. I went from being against the war in Vietnam to being actively in support of the NATIONAL LIBERATION FRONT (NLF) and North Vietnam. These women and men not only wanted to be in control of their national territory, but they wanted to construct a new society in which all citizens could participate and gain equal treatment. And if the Vietnamese had the right to build a new society, did not every other colonized, oppressed nation have that right, including right in the U.S.?

Young Black men and women, young Chicanos, Asians, and Native Americans were making demand on the American state. They were and still are just demands. I, along with many other white radicals, grasped the justness and the necessity of these demands. We supported those liberation movements as well as those beyond the borders from Vietnam to Cuba to Angola, Mozambique, and Palestine. We supported insurgencies in Columbia and Uruguay, in Iran and Eritrea.

Frederick Douglass said, "Power concedes nothing without struggle." Che Guevara said two, three more Vietnams and went to Bolivia, giving up his secure, relatively comfortable place in building a Cuban revolutionary society. He died there, murdered by the Bolivian army supported by U.S. CIA/military advisers. Malcolm X said that Black people must gain their freedom "by any means necessary." How could I as a white person, a socialist, and an internationalist sit by and support people struggling here and around the world, without standing up as well? It is a risk to live; one can sit still and die. When I and others were called on and challenged, we responded. We were already prepared to act: we had been moved by the experience of the Tupamaros in Uruguay who engaged in urban guerrilla warfare. We had a wealth of experience to draw on and believed it possible here, particularly because of the rise of the Black Liberation movement.

RnB: You refer to “the system” and “imperialism.” In current radical discourse, it is more common to talk of various systems of oppression. How do you define imperialism?

DG: Imperialism is built on and incorporates the structures of patriarchy and capitalism. And it is important whatever name we use to recognize the fullness of all modes of oppression: class exploitation, male supremacy and the related homophobia, white supremacy, and the host of other ways human beings are demeaned and limited.

But I think it all comes together in a more or less coherent social structure, with a range of sophisticated and brutal methods for a ruling class to maintain power. The value of the term “imperialism” is that it emphasizes the importance of a global system: the crucial polarization of wealth and power between a few rich and controlling “centers” (in Western Europe, the U.S., and Japan) and the impoverished “periphery” of the third world. The wealth of one pole is totally connected with the abject poverty of the other; the human and natural resources of the third world have been ruthlessly exploited to build up the developed economies. Thus, “imperialism” speaks most directly to the oppression of three-quarters of humankind.

That vantage point helps us see why third world struggles have been so central in the modern world. And there is the added resonance with the foundation of the U.S. on the internal colonization of Native Americans, New Afrikans (Blacks), Mexicano/as, and Puertoriceno/as. Those structures help to explain the depths of racism within this country and why that has so often corroded potentially radical movements among white people. “Imperialism” is a summary word meant both to include all those elements author bell hooks underscores with the phrase “white supremacist capitalist patriarchy” and to emphasize the importance of solidarity with third world struggles.

RnB: Looking back over your own personal and political history, how did you first become politically aware and active? How and why did it lead you in an anti-imperialist direction?

DG: Growing up in a white middle-class suburb where health care, good education and economic security were pretty much guaranteed, I was a fervent believer in democracy and the myth that there was equal opportunity for all. That myth was exploded for me at the age of fifteen, with the 1960 Greensboro, NC, sit-in. Not only did the growing civil rights movement expose the disgusting racism and inequality, but it also served as an inspiring example because of its humane sense of purpose, its strong sense of community, and the hopefulness that it generated.

At this same time, I began to look critically at U.S. foreign policy and saw that quite contrary to “supporting democracy” the U.S. was systematically imposing ruthless dictators throughout the third world as guarantors of U.S. business interests. Guatemala and Iran were two salient examples from

Marilyn Buck

Marilyn Buck was among the first women to address the national Students for a Democratic Society (SDS, a radical, mass antiwar organization) around issues of sexism. Her experiences working with the Black community and protesting the Vietnam War led to her consistent resistance. Marilyn was an early worker with Newsreel, an educational institution which documents people’s movements through film and video to this day.

A longtime antiracist ally of the Black Liberation Army, she is serving an eighty-year sentence for conspiracies to free political prisoners allegedly Assata Shakur, to protest and alter government policies through the use of violence, and to raise funds for Black liberation organizations through expropriations. Marilyn can be reached directly at #00482285, FCI Pleasanton, 5701 8th Street, Camp Parks B, Dublin, CA 94568.

RnB: Over the past years that you’ve been in prison, many changes have taken place in the world and in our movements. When you made your decision to take militant action, there was a sense of worldwide revolution on the rise. Now, although there are many trends of protest and fight back, reaction appears to have consolidated. In this context, do you regret the sacrifice you made to fight against U.S. imperialism?

MB: Though the war between the forces of reaction the imperialists and their lackeys and the oppressed and exploited peoples and nations of the world may have been won by the former, advances have been made. The story of this next century has only begun to be developed. Perhaps it may seem that there is not an ascendant movement that can win against such a powerful corporate military enemy, but he is corrupt eating away at his own entrails; and, true, there are millions of people beat down, angry, protesting, and fighting back. Look at the Zapatistas. Their voice circles the globe, fiercely crying out resistance. Who will join them next? Can we not say that at some moment before us, the movement for liberation and social justice will coalesce to challenge the power of the international financial lords who rape and pillage? Do there not continue to be contradictions among those who rule? How long can the exploited and dispossessed endure? The enemy of humanity is not invincible!

So, you ask, was it worthwhile to sacrifice, when we have lost I I this is round? Absolutely. To give up my values and belief in the I rights t s of human beings to be free from oppression, to be free and I safe to live and develop societies based on inequality and injustice that it would be a sacrifice of the soul.

There’s no doubt that the prices paid and gains made have me saddened, angry, with a taste of bitterness in my mouth the taste of blood spilled, the bodies and minds crippled and interred. I feel immense sorrow that the human potential of so many millions including my own has been cut off, shackled, and chained.

RnB: Some movement activists have expressed the idea that violence cannot be justified for any reason, and even a few political prisoners have said that they were wrong to engage in violent acts. What are your feelings on this? How have they changed over the years?

DG: Those who hold power envelop us in a media virtual reality that makes political violence exclusively an issue of the actions of opponents of the system. It's obscene to accept those parameters, because they demand a heartless silence about the untold and incalculable violence of the system massive and brutal, yet unnoticed because it is structured into the foundation of the status quo.

So let's start with just a glimpse of what the daily functioning of imperialism means in people's lives. Each year, twelve million children under the age of five die from malnutrition and easily preventable diseases that's 32,000 per day; 1.2 billion people live with virtually no access to health care; and 1.6 billion people don't even have direct access to drinkable water. One hundred million children lack the most basic schooling.

This colossal suffering is not an act of nature. We easily produce enough to meet all basic human needs. Abject poverty continues so that, for example, the 358 richest individuals in the world can amass a combined net worth of 760 billion dollars, more than the combined net worth of the poorest two and half billion people put together.

Enforcing such a vicious social order requires the repressive regimes around the world that have jailed, tortured, "disappeared," or murdered hundreds of thousands actually millions of persons.

I was initially a pacifist, but never one who condemned the resistance of the oppressed. The only principled form of nonviolence as beautifully exemplified by people like DAVE DELLINGER or Fay Honey Knopp is to constantly and creatively struggle against the infinitely greater violence of the social system.

After seven years of activism and analysis, I reluctantly concluded that there wasn't a chance against the forces of repression without developing a capacity for armed struggle. But there certainly have to be clear moral standards regarding how that struggle is implemented. With armed struggle as with any aspiration to play a "leading" role it is very easy to fall into the corruption of ego. So it is essential to have firm guidelines to keep such actions completely directed toward dismantling the power structure and to take the utmost precautions to avoid hurting civilians. We have to be sure that our action is always to further the interests of the oppressed and to build their participation rather than to aggrandize the armed group's own power and status. There have to be forms for criticism from and accountability to the oppressed. Of course, there are also critical issues about what constitutes an effective strategy, questions that I'm not addressing here but that are far from settled in today's world.

250 a year. In April 1987, I founded along with Mujahid Farid and Angel Nieves the first prisoners' peer education project on AIDS in the country. Corrections saw this as a threat as a form of "organizing" inmates and I was shipped out. I've been held in the most repressive prisons in the state since then. However, other sisters and brothers have developed good programs at a few other prisons including the first major success, at the women's prison in Bedford Hills. And even here at Comstock, after a very persistent effort, we have finally managed to piece together a half-decent peer project.

RnB: What do you think are the most urgent situations facing political prisoners in the U.S. today?

DG: The most urgent situation is Mumia AbuJamal the radical Black journalist facing execution after being framed for the 1981 killing of a Philadelphia policeman. And, as Mumia is the first to emphasize, the effort to save him has got to be part of a broader campaign for the 3,000 other people on death row to stop the brutal and racist death penalty.

Mumia is an excellent writer, with a magnetic personality. That's helped to build a growing movement, and it's been exciting for me to be able to feel active in it. But people have got to understand that it is still a very uphill battle; we have to build up a whole lot more momentum to stop the premeditated murder of this vibrant brother.

A second priority would be the case of LEONARD PELTIER, where there has been well-known and well-documented proof of frame-up. And there have been a number of other magnificent comrades like NuH WASHINGTON and SUNDIATA ACOLI who have been in prison since the early 1970s.

There is a particularly harmful trend now toward super-repressive prisons "control units" such as the feds' Florence or California's Pelican Bay. They typically operate with a twenty-three-hour-a-day lock-down, where prisoners are totally isolated from one another and there is a total control over movement conditions designed to drive people crazy. Political prisoners and jail-house organizers have been prime candidates for such control units.

RnB: What are your thoughts on the current political climate and on possible strategies for movement building?

DG: This is a very dangerous period. The mass frustration in society with the breakdown of the economic security that was previously guaranteed to the majority of whites has been channeled against those with the least power: immigrants, women and children on welfare, prisoners. Such shameless and racist scapegoating, when fully developed, is a defining characteristic of fascism. While that has been mainly directed by those in power, there is also an armed white supremacist movement that is not

civilians peasants, Indians, laborers, women, students have been “disappeared.” “Disappeared” is a euphemism for when gangs of police or soldiers illegally kidnap suspected opponents of the regime. They are never seen again because they usually are tortured and interrogated and then murdered and buried in unmarked graves. This form of terrorism is common among the U.S. client regimes in Central America; in fact, the worst abuses come from military and police units whose leadership was trained in the U.S.

Or, to take just one more example, how many people in the U.S. know that the worst genocide relative to population since the Holocaust is occurring in East Timor? Since Indonesia invaded that island in 1975, an estimated 200,000 of the 690,000 East Timorese have been killed. In addition, the social conditions imposed by occupation have left the East Timorese with the highest infant mortality rate in the world. Indonesia isn't just a close ally, supported and armed by the U.S.; the brutal military regime there was installed by a CIA-supported coup that involved massacring a half million Indonesians. Of course, it was all for a good cause. Today, Indonesian women work at Nike's factories for \$2.10 per day. When you buy those Nike running shoes for \$80.00, about \$2.60 of that goes to pay the wages of the workers who made them.

There are literally millions of other examples where the human realities are totally whited-out, off screen, out of print. I'm not saying that the antidote to the media's crass manipulation of our emotions is to cynically close ourselves to the human displays they do present. What I'm asking for instead is that we open our hearts and consciousness much more widely to know about and feel the many more people who are ripped apart by the naked political repression and barbarous social conditions inflicted by imperialism. These are all human beings, whose lives matter.

When we look at the issue of violence in an honest and fully human way, the primary question becomes how can we most effectively change this unjust social system?

RnB: What are the specific historical conditions that were the context for your decision to take up armed struggle?

DG: Between 1969 and 1970, two main realities impelled us toward armed struggle. One was the intensity the human toll of the war in Indochina, that the U.S. government continued to escalate despite massive protests. The second was the series of murderous assaults on the Black liberation movement, conducted through the FBI's Counterintelligence Program (COINTELPRO). About forty members of the Black Panther Party killed from 1968 to 1971, and more than one thousand were imprisoned. It was also a time of mass uprisings, met by deadly state repression, in numerous New Afrikan ghettos.

The WEATHER UNDERGROUND ORGANIZATION (WUO) arose from a commitment to raise the level of struggle in solidarity with

and potential was and still is U.S.-led imperialism. But the East European countries certainly weren't our leadership or our model for an alternative. Some new leftists came around to a more favorable view of the Soviet Bloc because of the importance of its aid to struggles such as Vietnam, Cuba and Angola. But for me, for many of us, that never spilled over into seeing them as “socialist.”

The great inspiration and hope for the new left were the national liberation movements, both internationally and within the U.S. These movements were all-important in two ways:

First, the linchpin of imperialism's economic survival is the riches they extract via cheap labor and raw materials from their economic control of the third world. A series of victories for national liberation “the domino effect” could fatally imperil imperialism. In fact, I would argue that even the obsessive anti-communism of the cold war was more about the support that bloc could offer the struggles of the all-important exploitation zones of the South, trying to break from imperialist control.

Secondly, these revolutions involved the most desperately oppressed people and represented the vast majority in the world. Most had some sense and practice that women's liberation is essential. Also, they stood for a complete overthrow of the old order. So the exhilarating hope was that the rising of the oppressed, the world's majority, could finally reshape society in a humane way.

Therefore, the political definition of this period comes from the setbacks to national liberation after 1979, starting ten years before the collapse of the Soviet Bloc. I don't know of a definitive analysis of what happened or of current prospects. The high point was Vietnam's victory in 1975 and the wave of liberation through 1979. But even though Vietnam heroically won the war, the economic and social devastation was overwhelming. In Angola, Mozambique, and Nicaragua, imperialism showed that it could use a combination of economic and “low intensity” military warfare to bleed such small countries to the point that the social gains of revolutions were obliterated, with heartbreaking human suffering. The alternative approach to such costly confrontation was the negotiated agreements such as in Zimbabwe and South Africa that left most of the old basic economic structures in place. With both sets of movements, internal political weaknesses became very telling under such pressures. And we also have major responsibility or not being able to build especially since the early 1970s strong and effective solidarity movements within the imperial nations.

Even Cuba, whose revolutionary accomplishments and resolve have been exemplary, is now having a terribly rough time with the combination of U.S. economic embargo and the collapse of Soviet aid. But, in a way, the most discouraging example to me is China, because they have the size and were well enough established to not be as vulnerable to external destabilization. And they had also made the breakthrough of deep roots in the

DG: Our first outstanding accomplishment was piercing the myth of government invincibility. In 1970, the conventional wisdom was that the Weather Underground Organization (WUO) wouldn't last a year because "the FBI always got their man"! But the WUO functioned for seven years until we split and disbanded due to internal political weaknesses and carried out more than twenty bombings of government and corporate buildings without so much as injuring a single civilian. Including other formations such as the UNITED FREEDOM FRONT, there was a fifteen-year history of white anti-imperialists carrying out armed action.

Our other main achievement was the political example of fighting in solidarity with third world struggles. Our practice in this area was inconsistent and inadequate, but we did succeed at times in making this work a visible priority. It was also significant that so many women participated and were leaders in the clandestine organizations, although this did not mean that we were able to overcome our sexism in terms of our program or personal relationships.

A main problem was various forms of racism. It's amazing how deep this stuff runs, that even while consciously opposing it, we continued to make racist errors. In some periods, we just built our own organization, enjoying the greater resources and the protection of being white without offering significant support to Black or Latino or Native armed struggle groups under attack. At worst, we even pretended to an overall leadership of a U.S. revolution."The opposite swing of the pendulum was to put ourselves under "direct third world leadership." But that became away of intervening in their struggles by throwing our resources to the group of our choice, before the strategic issues involved had been resolved by the national liberation movement as a whole. It's not that there is a set blueprint for the correct way to relate, but we need a better consciousness to avoid both the arrogance of total unaccountability or the interventionism of picking the third world leadership. These apparently opposite forms of racism have a common element: our wanting to be validated as "the most revolutionary white folks going" either through our own claim of leadership or, once that was discredited, through getting the stamp of approval from a heavy third world group.

Another serious error has been militarism, which makes the military deeds and daring of a small group all-important, rather than the political principles and the concerted effort to build a movement at all levels. This error is usually bolstered by sectarianism, a contempt for those leftists who don't engage in armed struggle or who have a somewhat different political line. These errors are dangerous because you cut yourself off from potential allies and at the same time you tend to try to prove yourself by upping the military ante beyond what you can sustain. As costly as all the above errors were, they tended to recur in one formation after another.

Looking at the repetition of these well-identified errors, I have to say it might not sound very political, but I think that it is 'that ego is one hell of

a problem. You can be attracted to a cause for the most idealistic of reasons and can endure personal sacrifices to build an organization, only to get caught up in all kinds of maneuvers for power and status. Once you're into this dynamic, it is easy to rationalize that your only concern is for the cause. Very decent people, once in leadership, would become highly manipulative; former iconoclasts, once they became cadre, would abandon their critical faculties in order to curry favor with leadership. These patterns recurred so often that I think recriminations over which individuals were better or worse miss the point there's been a deep problem around process for building a revolutionary movement.

By process, I mean how we conduct political discussion, how we make and implement policy decisions, how we treat each other as individuals. The Leninist theory Of DEMOCRATIC CENTRALISM sounded beautiful, but in my experience the result was always overly hierarchical organizations. So I can only conclude that the theory itself is seriously flawed. I don't know of any well-defined solution to these problems. The women's movement has done some valuable, if uneven, work in this area, and perhaps the CHRISTIAN BASE COMMUNITIES in Latin America have as well. It is very difficult to achieve, simultaneously, a disciplined combat organization and a fully democratic and humane process yet both are emphatically necessary. There is an important sense in which we have to try to implement "the personal is political": the ideal we express in our politics must also be put into practice in our human relationships.

Why hasn't there been more written on our errors? The obstacle of not giving up security details to the state can be readily overcome by focusing on the political themes and lessons. So I believe the main problem has been our reluctance to face up to and analyze our errors, along with the lack of consensus about them. There is no way to sugarcoat it: this dearth of self-criticism and analysis is a serious failure to carry out our responsibilities to the movement.

RnB: How have your years in prison and the changes in the world over these past years affected how you view and understand the systems of imperialism and oppression?

DG: The most salient changes over the past fifteen years are the ruthless redistribution of wealth from poor to rich and the globalization of the economy. These trends have been widely discussed, so I won't attempt to re-summarize them here. Instead I want to mention their underside: the increased fragmentation of the oppressed. The same organization of technology that makes for telecommunications and flexible production has enabled international capital to divide those it exploits into increasingly fractious subgroups, separated according to role in production, culture, and competing survival needs. You have inner-city Blacks, various communities of immigrant workers, women in suburban factories child laborers in Pakistan, and Scottish engineers, for example, all filling very different slots in production, with very different rewards and status. I think that NightVi-