



Behind the Walls

by Larry Baker #35021
O.S.P. Correspondent

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Assistant Editor

Over the past weekend a few of the inmates behind these walls have been cornering this correspondent to ask if the guards are going to go on strike this week? So it was appropriate that I approach Correctional Officer Dave Cortez, president of the penitentiary employees Local 2623 of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME).

"That is definitely untrue," states Cortez, who has been employed at OSP for eight years. Rumors are the easiest things to get started when one is enclosed in the walls of a 1500 inmate population prison and some of those rumors can become very frightening and dangerous if not accurately reported. Words like "explosive", "riot" and even "strike" when associated with prison seem to create an unhealthy feeling with the public as well as the institutional atmosphere even though a local newspaper writer may have innocently written them to report an incident occurring at the prison. Because when this correspondent traced this guard strike rumor, I found the main source was an article in Salem's *Oregon Statesman* about a dispute continuously going on over an arbitration difference. The article had not mentioned a guard strike.

With a sigh of relief, I was happy to learn that the problem is strictly between correctional officers and the prison management instead of between guards and inmates, as is so frequently reported.

Cortez stated that the guards were asking the management to provide them with more adequate staffing, equal treatment in promotions, less "intimidation" by superior officers and administrators, better training for correctional officers and initiation of the contract that the guards felt they won during negotiations with the State. Even last week the guards' representative had a long meeting with the Governor, who appointed the prison's ombudsman, Paul Aronson, to try and arrange a meeting with the

prison's administration to see if the differences can be worked out.

Another complaint Cortez loudly voiced was on the "over-crowding" of the inmate population at the prison, where many of the inmates are actually sleeping on the cold cement floor with thin mattresses.

"We need another penitentiary," said Cortez, "because the Community Corrections Act is not working -- in fact, it is a complete failure."

I asked Cortez how Community Corrections is failing.

He stated that many of the counties accepting the state funds are putting the funds into maintenance of jail facilities instead of human resources.

When asked about "equal treatment of officers in promotions", Cortez felt promotion was being done on the "buddy-buddy" system. Harold Whitley, prison Chief of Security, disagreed. "We are bound by personnel rules and regulations to obtain the most qualified person for the job," he said.

Whitley stated, "Any time an officer is found asleep at his post, breaching security, or bringing a weapon onto the institution grounds, etc., this is a direct violation and not in compliance with not only institutional rules, but state law."

Whitley continued by saying that he demanded correctional officers to adhere strictly to the letter of the rules and procedures, just as it is required of inmates to follow rules set for them. "If an inmate steps out of line, he is subject to disciplinary action. So be it with an officer."

Whitley did admit there is a need for more training, but feels the best training possible is being provided within the legislative budget allotted. He expects all of his staff to keep abreast and learn all the rules and regulations set down by the administration as well as the policies and procedures administered by the Corrections Division.

Cortez said, "Many of the guards feel that the inmates have too many legal rights at OSP." Whitley stated

as long as the inmates have civil rights by law, they will be honored by his staff. Another officer, who wished not to be identified, stated that it takes the whole staff to protect the convicts' rights, but nothing is written to protect the civil and legal rights of the officers.

Whitley said that at the present time, this is the most relaxed prison atmosphere he has seen in his twenty-four years at OSP, and he intends to keep it that way. When a female officer was asked if she felt she is working in a relaxed atmosphere, her views agreed with Whitley's.

This article was not written to create chaos between the guards and the administration in their struggle to solve the working conditions, but it was written to point out one main fact. That is the feeling of fear that can silently settle on your nerves when you wake up in the morning, locked in a 9x12 barred cell, and read in the local newspaper, GUARDS WARN OF 'EXPLOSIVE ATMOSPHERE' AT PRISON. If you've spent as many years behind these walls as I have, you get sick and tired of hearing or reading how dangerous you are or can be every time the guards or prison officials want a pay raise or better working conditions. It puts tension on an over-crowded inmate population. It also sends a chilly fear through any inmate who may have loved ones and family waiting on the outside. It is a form of agitation directed at the inmates that should be stopped because the majority just want to do their time as peacefully as possible and split.

And I write this story for those who have the powers of the press. Reporting an incident occurring behind prison walls can make things worse than they really are if not reported accurately. The issue of the day is between the guards and the administration. While they are solving their grievances through arbitration the inmates should be left completely out of it. Hopefully this will be acknowledged as just another way to keep 'peace in the valley'.

CELL TALK

By Asmar Abdu Seifullah
aka Joe West #40404



ASMAR ABDUL SEIFULLAH
Power/Freedom/Unity

I would like to begin these lines with the word *Amandla* (Power), a frequently used word in the people's struggle for freedom in the country of South Africa, recently renamed Azania. I use the word *Amandla* (Power) because it's evident that we still don't have our version of power as related to the community.

It might sound strange that I should speak of the community from a prison cell but the cell that confines my physical self doesn't bar my spiritual and mental essence from the sentiments that are inherent in all people. I would like to say that the community is also confined behind these granite walls; that as long as one Blackman or woman is subjected to the oppression of their basic human rights—as long as one Blackman or woman is reacting in the manner of the grafted slave mentality and the effect it has on the completion of Black dreams—we'll never obtain Uhuru (freedom) or *Amandla* (power). I don't mean to frighten anyone with the use of the word *Amandla*, I seek only to identify as colonial refugees did during the Revolutionary War of Independence. *Amandla* doesn't mean down with whitey or the fall

of the American Dream, it means the return of a Black moral consciousness, with Black people defining their goals and controlling their destinies; it means love for all who embrace the concepts of justice, liberty and equality for all; it means making America the land of the free and the home of the brave; it means the return of the Shah, the destruction of the Klan and all the other things that are leading to the deterioration of a once great country.

I know that with all the problems the community is having with the community very few people have the time or inclination to champion the cause of incarcerated Blacks. I write these lines because it's time—past time that the muffled screams were heard; it's time—past time—that the community realized that our ties, kinship and bonds are one—whether the cell be of concrete and steel or the confinement of a nine-to-five job.

Many Blackmen confined behind these walls have been and still are creatures of impulse: it's their impulsive nature that leads them to prison; it's also their impulsive attributes that keep them confined mentally, morally and spiritually while they're incarcerated. UHURU, the Black culture organization of O.S.P., is attempting to curb this impulsive nature by exhibiting alternatives to the dead slave mentality: by attacking the ghettos of the mind we hope to achieve the awareness, patience, discipline, love and perseverance necessary to become responsible Blackmen and productive members of the Black community.

Prison is without a doubt the epitome of man's inhumanity to man. It exemplifies society's inability to deal with its social, economic and moral problems. It's doubly inhuman if you happen to be a Blackman—however, there are Blackmen confined behind these walls who're endeavoring to come out of this debauchery wholesome—alive—humaner! UHURU is one of the vehicles behind the walls that is providing for the growth of the human spirit in O.S.P.

Like many Black inspired, Black

oriented organizations to spring up out of the frustration and anxieties of Black existence, UHURU has traditionally suffered from misdirection, misrepresentation, misplaced priorities and collective disunity. The blame must be squarely placed on our shoulders (Black inmates)—those of us confined and those not confined. We are all one whether we choose to recognize each other or not. It's going to take a concerted effort on both fronts to bring about a change in the lives of Black folk. Also, because prison is such a lonely place—because it eats holes in the souls of Black people—we desperately need to reaffirm our ties with the community. Our strength lies in the arms of the community, our tomorrows revolve around the community and it's the community that must reclaim its lost sons and daughters. We understand that UHURU and its members must prove to the community that they're worthy of its support love and consideration—but the community must first give us a chance. We ask only that the community understand that those of us who have fallen victim to the circumstances and conditions that set Black people apart desire to return to the fold. We desperately need the support of the community—now!!! UHURU needs teachers, lecturers, artists—anyone who can help counteract the effects of indoctrination and incarceration; we need guidance from a community standpoint.

Traditionally we've been a people with over three hundred years of indoctrination grafted into us: we've been overworked, underpaid, overtaxed and taught from the cradle to the grave to abhor and reject anything Black in concept. We're still very much slaves in our attitudes and in our approaches to freedom. Denying the slave within ourselves won't set the slave free; when we recognize our bondage we will be able to bring clear focus on the struggle.

UHURU is endeavoring to teach Blackmen to understand the complexities of neo-colonialism. Recognizing the problem is half the battle—please help us with the other half.

The Lucid Walls of Time

Editor: Julius Snowden

REMINISCENCE

From a window,
I can see a garden,
Flourishing with gayly colors,
Visitors march by
day after day,
Look so neat,
To them anyway,
If only they could see,
the grayness
on the otherside,
the side that I can see,
No flowers,
to brighten the day,
no garden
to display,
only gray,
gray heroic walls,
tons of concrete,
that separate
me from the
rest of the world,

Might they share the gloom,
the agony of defeat
should they wander through
the cell blocks,
where I cry out from,
maybe so,
but they never see,
the gray,
else,
some change
would surely be
made.

By Gary Wn. Holt 41300

"A SIMPLE CRY"

An old man sits alone
with the windowshade
pulled down,

And he mutters his opinions
To the children's
Photographs on the wall.
The dribble on his chin
Glistens in the light
Of a prancing fire,
And he twists his face
Into a smile;
He doesn't have his
Teeth in,
His eyes are wet and twinkling.
He laughs silently
And then he feels foolish
So he stops.
He sees the half-empty
Glass of brandy
On the wooden table,
And he drinks what remains.
Then he hurls the empty glass
Into the fireplace
And he sleeps.

By Michael Stephens 40611

A PERSONAL MOMENT FOR THOSE WHO CARE

A bicycle will stay up a long as it moves. The unseen force that provides this miracle is in the wheels. When they turn, a force called centrifugal throws out from the center and this holds the bicycle upright. Untold numbers of forces effect our lives, some known, others still unknown. The most powerful force keeping us upright and on the right track is love.

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