



# Behind the Walls

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## LIVE AND LET LIVE

By David Wright  
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*No sword on earth, were it the Excalibur of King Arthur, can cut that which opposes no steady resistance to the blow.*

These words by the Wizard of the North, Sir Walter Scott, gives an idea of what the typical prison inmate is up against when dealing with staff, administration, and public opinion.

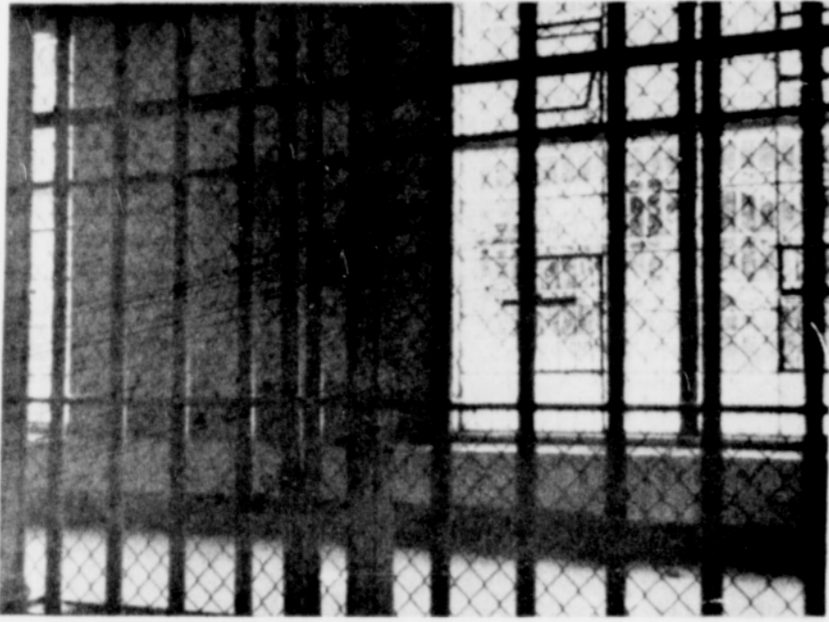
One not familiar with society within these walls might be inclined to believe that our problems and fears are confined within this miniature society and controlled by men trained in correction and rehabilitation. But such is not the case—at least not entirely. Public opinion and reactions are devastating, opposing no steady resistance to our problem, but nevertheless having a critical impact, indirectly, on our lives and the well-being of our families.

The indirect involvement of the public is initiated by the media. People seem to thrive on violence. When prison is mentioned, convicts are automatically spotlighted, regardless of their participation, because of the violent nature. Although "violent" might be an appropriate tag, it is a difficult blow to deal with, difficult to oppose when it catches us off guard and especially so when the pressure is so illusive and diverse.

A convict has two important responsibilities. The first, obviously, is to obtain a release. The second is to do their time in the easiest manner possible. Dealing with public sentiment is not an easy way to do time, but the public's reaction to prison related problems makes time even more difficult.

Yesterday, after a meeting with the Governor, several newspapers published articles about a labor dispute between the correctional officer's union and whoever they dispute with; be it the state, the Governor, or prison administration. As an inmate, I could care less who they engage in arbitration with or what the arbitration concerns. Prisoners are not organized, nor do they participate in collective bargaining—we just do time and arbitrate in the courts.

Now, thanks to several choice articles, inmates have become involved in something they not only have nothing to do with and no say in, but also are not interested in getting involved in—we have enough problems. The labor dispute, I have found out, is concerned, among other things, with the inmate-to-guard ratio, which creates a "potentially dangerous situation." The media has interpreted "potentially dangerous situation" to mean "explosive atmosphere," or tinder box, and printed it that way. I see no relationship between the two. Anything can be, or is, a potentially dangerous situation. Driving a car is potentially dangerous, but it's not a tinder box ready to explode at any given moment after taking one's position in the driver's seat. But if the gas tank had a leak, or some other part of the car was mal-



A view from inside a cell

functioning, it would be explosive.

The interpretation of "potentially dangerous situation" within the prison as explosive, directly reflects on the inmates. Apparently, we, like a leaking gas tank, are ready to explode. This statement became the beginning of a self-fulfilling prophesy. Inmates became concerned, rumors raged rampant, and all because of one misquoted statement.

I went to Mr. Whitley, head of prison security, and asked him what was going on. "In my twenty-five years in corrections, this is the most relaxed prison atmosphere I have seen," he told me. He also said that racial tension is the least it has ever been. To back up those statements he gave me three memorandums. One is from T.F. Keohane, Jr., from the federal penitentiary in Leavenworth, Kansas. He said, in part, "thank you and your staff for allowing us to see your neat and well managed institution...you all maintain it in outstanding condition and appearance..." The second memorandum, from Abelicio Chavez, head of a government survey on prisons, says, "I received professional and courteous treatment (while at OPS)...The professional attitude is reflected (in that) OSP has a stable, positive climate in all areas of operation." The third memorandum is an article about Warden Paul Morris of Folsom Prison during his tour of OSP. It says: "One thing that was very apparent was morale. It's high, for a prison. In some of these places you can cut the air with a knife, it's so tense. That doesn't seem to be the case here. Obviously, it's a well run prison."

These statements are almost a year old. Mr. Whitley claims the tension is even less now. He also told me that a relaxed atmosphere is most conducive to effective rehabilitation and security inside an institution. So if the guards are having disputes among themselves or their unions or the administration, that is their problem, and they apparently want to deal with it professionally without unnecessarily abusing inmates. As for a strike, officer Dave Cortez, president of the guard's union, told me there is no strike planned—"absolutely not" he said. I asked him if the guards have any disputes with

the inmates and again he said "absolutely not." This is a problem they have and is in no way on account of the inmates as a whole. Indirectly, however, the overpopulation is a point they are concerned with. Again, this is not our concern, nor are we accountable for it. We are only accountable when reporting a "potentially dangerous situation" with an aura of sensationalism, newspapers spotlight convicts, labeling them as "explosive" or ready to explode.

The media is a two-edged sword. It affects more people and forces than any felon can manage alone. There is no steady resistance or attack to deal with. The media can cut twice. One edge cuts immediately by inciting public reaction; the other edge is held in reserve as a self-fulfilling prophesy and biding its time, ready to cut at the most inopportune moment. It does not resemble the sword, Excalibur, of King Arthur; resisting all other metal, incapable of breaking or being defeated. Arthur won all his battles until some recalcitrant knight stole Excalibur and replaced it with an imposter.

There is an interesting parody to the story. Merlin the magician told Arthur that the sheath for his sword would prove more effective in battle than the sword itself. With the sheath strapped to his side, Arthur would never lose a drop of blood, regardless of the severity of his wounds. It's interesting that a sheath is used as a cover—to protect when the media can join a bandwagon with the partisan public using inmates as a sheath to cover and protect. Those articles used an "explosive" imposter to sell a potential situation. With such a sheath strapped to one's belt, blood will not be lost, regardless of the wounding nature the media can exercise and the public will react to.

## Police brutality

(Continued from page 1 col. 6)

Those who call the hot line, should please leave their telephone number and the best time BUF representatives can get back in touch with them. An appointment will be made to discuss the complaint, after which the law and justice committee will review and recommend what steps might be taken when enough verifiable complaints are obtained, the BUF will be able to take legal action against the police department.

"If you see someone being misused by the police, write down the details of what happened: time; place; number of officers involved. Get the information to the person involved or their family. If you don't know the person call the hot line, 288-9160, and we will try to get the information to them. We must help each other," Ronnie Herndon, Co-Chairman of the BUF advised.

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# CELL TALK

By Asmar Abdu Seifullah  
aka Joe West #40404

## POLITICAL AWARENESS AND BLACKFOLKS

Today was a very good day, a good day as prison days go—that is—a good day for a Blackman trying to find a way out of a self made coffin of despair.

Today as I went about the business of being Black and beautiful and proud of being alive—with hope, I had the privilege of meeting a success-success in the person of Chick Edwards, a State Representative for Marion County and West Salem. Chick, who's a smallish man with a congenial political smile and an exceptional gift for words, surprised me with some very important insights. The reason why I say he surprised me is that I'm very offish with most white people. Perhaps it's because of the history of abuse I've received at the hands of whitefolks which left me with an ingrained distrust of them. I can be very cynical in this respect and I pride myself in being able to pick out the fakes and squares on sight. But in this particular instance I reserved my judgement and collared my cynicism until hearing out the whiteman afore mentioned.

The conversation ranged around politics, political responsibility and the definition of politics. We discussed the political involvement of Black people in general and how they view the political apparatus that governs their lives. I found Chick to be very open and honest in his opinions and surprisingly I found that I agreed with him on the topics discussed.

What I received most from the encounter was an insight into politics in terms of people, the use of personal politics to achieve success and in the words of Chick Edwards, "politics is the ability to influence people."

I now ask you what does all this mean to us as Black citizens of America; what are our politics and how do we gain the influence to put our politics into action? These questions might seem rhetorical but they must be answered if we're to achieve our rightful place in this society.

Are we to follow the roles that

society has traditionally set for us—typed and cast as second class citizens or will we seek total equality, total freedom and total liberation of all our oppressed masses; will we argue amongst ourselves as to which road to follow and eventually end up still standing in unemployment lines and at food stamp counters; will we-can we align ourselves behind our chosen Black political leaders or will we end up in opposition-debating on the virtues of liberals as compared to our more outspoken representatives; will we get bogged down in the muck and mire of gradualism or will we seek "freedom now" at all cost; will our politics allow us to love and respect one another or will we remain niggers fighting over a piece of watermelon; is a revolution conceivable or are we playing lip service to our egoes?"

The questions are endless because we haven't collectively come to any answers. There are those of us who'd rather kill a mickey of tokay than attack the pertinent issues of liberation. There are those who seek individual glory, rather than collective stability—will the big dog continue to get the bone or will we forget about the bone and go for the meat?"

In essence what I'm trying to say is that our politics-the politics of Black-people-must include all Black people. We've got to somehow unite the brothers in the pool halls with the brothers on capital hill. We must consolidate all our individual efforts and resources into one big thrust for freedom. We must become politically aware of ourselves and the power we represent as a political force in this country. It's foolish for any Blackman or woman to say that they aren't into politics; if you aren't into politics, you aren't into yourself. Politics is money and money is food on the table and gas in the tank.

The whole world is politically oriented and we're still arguing about what to wear or how to get over with the sister across the street. The Russians, Iranians, Chinese, Africans and the American white people all have their politics. Yet

here we are in 1980 still wondering what happened to us. Our forefathers help build this country; they sweated, cried and died to make America the land that it is today; it was the political awareness of the slavemaster that made Black people slaves and it's going to be the political awareness of Black people that will set us free.

A man that doesn't stand for something will go for anything and that's politics. I pray that the 80's don't find us still trying to identify with yesterday; if we don't achieve freedom, it will be because we didn't want to be free; we can't blame anyone for our present problems and we can't expect anyone to give us anything that we don't give ourselves. To long have we made excuses-it's time to get the ability to influence people; it's time to become political!

Oppression the wheel of madness grinds daily, while simple people-sit and stare-wonder why?

### A PERSONAL MOMENT FOR THOSE WHO CARE

Mankind is running out of some energy resources faster than nature can replenish them. We wear out our automobiles, our homes grow old. Burned out light bulbs and worn out clothing is proof nothing lasts. Nothing is permanent, we are even wearing ourselves out in mind and body. The exception is love, properly cared for it will last forever.

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