

Organizing Inside: Prison Justice Day (August 10th) A Non- Violent Response to Penal Repression

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In the summer of 1991, Prison Justice Day was observed for the sixteenth consecutive year in Canada. Originating in the cauldron of violence and repression that characterized Millhaven Penitentiary in the mid-1970s, National Prison Justice Day is the product of prisoners' organized political action. It is a day of remembrance, a memorial day for those who have died in prison. It is also a day on which prisoners stand together in a show of solidarity and present their concerns and demands.

In this essay, I will provide a history of the Odyssey Group and their initiative, National Prison Justice Day. In doing so, I will also address the political struggles of prisoners and their significance. The political consciousness and struggles of Canadian prisoners has been either denied or ignored by Canadian criminologists and social scientists.¹ The slow, grinding struggles characteristic of the process of advancing prisoners' rights have also led some prisoners to devalue their political struggles as pointless or unproductive. However, in the tradition of the penal press, prisoners continue to reach outside the walls to educate and radicalize the public *vis-à-vis* the nature of criminal justice and penal oppression. Contemporary groups such as "Infinity Lifers" (1986-1991) at Collins Bay Penitentiary and "The Justice Group" (1987-1991) at Stony Mountain Penitentiary, represent this tradition. The success of the Odyssey Group's Prison Justice Day initiative exemplifies the outside directed nature of prisoner politics and the ability of prisoners to effect change. It should give strength to prisoners and their outside supporters and encouragement

in their struggles for rights and against penal oppression. In addition, I will illustrate how the penal press provides an entry into the discourse and analysis of Canadian prisoners. A major lacuna in Canadian social science and historiography is the perspective and position of the criminalized underclass and carceral population. The penal press is the only comprehensive body of writing which allows us to access this “history from below.” If those in control seriously started to take into account the discourse of prisoners, instead of being driven by entrepreneurial desire or the spirit of managerial manipulation and panic, prison life might be less a matter of survival, and we as a society might discover reasons to reduce our reliance on criminal justice and criminalization to address social conflict and inequality.

THE ODYSSEY GROUP 1976-82

To understand this prison group it is necessary first to examine the context of violent repression which gave it birth. The reform urge of the 1950s — with its emphasis on bringing prisoners’ initiatives in line with the provision of vocational training and education — gave way to the new individual and individualizing treatment ideology of the 1960s. Though Canada’s federal prisoners had initially supported the post war reforms, by the late 1950s they were rejecting them as superficial window dressing created for public consumption.² The new treatment programs of the 1960s (e.g., group therapy) were actively opposed by both prisoners and custodial staff. Internal strife and competition over the control of institutions mounted: senior management, custodial staff and treatment staff; custodial staff and prisoners; and treatment staff and prisoners all squared off. Of major significance was the unionization of penitentiary staff within the Public Service Alliance of Canada in 1968, and the subsequent surge of power and control of frontline custodial officers. The events of the 1960s lay the ground for a decade (*i.e.*, 1970s) of penal repression and prison disturbances unparalleled in Canadian history. The decade opened with one of the worst prison riots on record. The Kingston penitentiary riot (1971) set the stage for the *noir* nightmare regime of the new

Millhaven prison, opened in its aftermath.³ It is no small, nor laudable achievement but Millhaven became legendary for the overt brutality of its regime in the first five years of operation. It is in this context that we must situate the creation of the Odyssey Group.

The Odyssey Group was formed in 1976, and was modelled upon one of the first prisoner groups in that institution, The Quarter Century Group, also created by long-term prisoners (*Odyssey Newsletter*, 1979 [1:6]: 23-25). A constitution was drawn up by the first executive committee, consisting of Howie Brown (chairperson), Leonard Olbey (vice-chairperson), and Chip Tracy (secretary-treasurer), and ratified by its membership on September 21, 1976. The group's constitution was formally recognized by Millhaven's administration on August 30, 1977 (*Ibid.*) The constitution presents a clear frame of reference as to the:

PURPOSE AND CONCEPT OF ODYSSEY

1. We shall aid in the preparation of proposals and presentations concerning all facets of prison programs and rehabilitation.
2. We shall [make] constructive suggestions on all types of reform, and establish a liaison with the Law Reform Commission of Canada.
3. We shall ask professional advice, by invitation, as an aid to the group. The group may consider and implement any program it deems beneficial to its development and well being.
4. Odyssey shall contact interested citizens, (professional, student, laymen etc., etc.) in the society to establish dialogue and programs of rehabilitative value (*Ibid.*).

Despite the rhetoric directed at the prison's administration via the stated goals of its constitution, Odyssey was clearly a prisoners' rights group.⁴ In light of the history of overt repression and violence at Millhaven and the political consciousness of Odyssey's members, the group was opposed to violence and dedicated to using non-violent means to effect change. They wanted

...to bring to the attention of the public what we, the members of the Odyssey Group and other contributing authors believe to be gross injustices perpetrated by the Canadian Correctional Service, Canada's Justice System and all other services related to the corrections field....

The Odyssey Group is a group of long-time prisoners who feel that the justice system in Canada can be changed by non-violent means. It is our purpose to do all in our power to bring about those changes (*Odyssey Newsletter*, 1980 [1:9]: 1).

Their strategy was to prepare briefs and analytical statements on prison conditions and justice issues, and to publicize them through group meetings with outsiders and through widespread distribution of their newsletter.⁵

The group consisted of fifteen inside members; prisoners were accepted into the group by application and ballot (*i.e.*, membership approval). This total matched the number of outside guests allowed to attend a meeting. The executive was elected bi-annually. After the leadership period of the initial executive (approximately two years), the executive committee constantly changed within a six-month to one-year period. In part, this was a strategy to protect members from harassment, and in part, the result of the transfer of members to other prisons. Odyssey met weekly from September 1976 to October 1982. It attracted a wide variety of guests and was in contact with numerous outside organizations, individuals and members of the mass media. Two groups' involvement and support stand out. The Ottawa Civil Liberties Association provided up to ten outside members and regularly attended meetings from February, 1978 until mid-1980. Ray Sunstrum and Liz Elliott were prominent in co-ordinating this support.⁶ Later, in 1980, sociology students from Queen's University under the co-ordination of Professor Laureen Snider provided strong support.

The groups' success in involving and influencing outside groups and individuals was considerable. For example, their brief on Special Handling Units (SHUs) and the use of segregation was used by The Church Council on Justice and Corrections in

their lobbying efforts to stop this practice. A feature article on Odyssey in *Centerfold* August/September 1979 issue states:

Talking in terms the Government can understand, The Odyssey Group acts within due processes of law. Briefs, hearings and management efficiency studies are prepared and circulated.... If the Odyssey Group's work is measured in terms of response from officials, they could indeed be said to be effective. The chairman of the group, Howard Brown and the editor of *Odyssey Magazine*, George Watson have both been shipped out ("Millhaven Prisoners Write for Active Reform" [Aug./Sept., 1979]; see also *Tarpaper*, 1979:18-30).

Noted guests who became strong supporters of Odyssey initiatives included prison rights activist Claire Culhane, who visited the group for the first time on October 23, 1979 (*Odyssey Newsletter*, 1979:56).

ODYSSEY NEWSLETTER

The principal vehicle for their public education activities was their newsletter whose expressed purpose was "that the Millhaven Prisoners' voice will be heard" (*Odyssey Newsletter*, 1978:2). Its aim was to "inform the prison population and the people in the society of our thoughts, goals and accomplishments" (*Odyssey Newsletter*, 1979:24):

Public apathy can only be combatted through education. Hopefully this newsletter will serve that purpose (*Odyssey Newsletter*, 1980: 1).

The first issue of this bi-monthly was published in August 1978.⁷ Over the next four years thirteen additional issues were published. The first six were published on schedule, but typically, administrative censorship and obstruction subsequently lead to a more sporadic output and smaller publications.⁸ Through its newsletter we can trace the development of Odyssey and its extension outside the walls, as well as the group's eventual demise. It reached its peak audience of 500 plus subscribers with the June/July 1979 issue which focused on two of the group's primary concerns, Special Handling Unit's

(SHUs)/administrative segregation and Prison Justice Day (*Odyssey Newsletter*, 1979, [1:6]:4)

The Odyssey Newsletter was initially edited by the groups' original chairperson, Howie Brown and George Watson. Brown was transferred from Millhaven after the first issue and George Watson remained editor for the first year before he was transferred. Watson exemplifies the type of politicized prisoner whose writing appears in the Canadian penal press through the latter part of the 1970s and the 1980s. In all there were eight editors and fifty-five contributors, including men and women from other penitentiaries. Much of the writing and analysis in this publication is highly politicized, going beyond the liberal consensus version of prison critique and penal reform, locating the 'prison problem' within the exploitative and oppressive context of the dominant capitalist order. Major issues addressed included: SHUs; the concept of 'dangerousness' and administrative segregation; prison violence, suicide and death; the power and control of custodial staff and their union; involuntary transfers; mandatory supervision and parole; the double standard of 'social justice' in Canada; the absurdity of 'rehabilitation' in prison, especially maximum security prisons like Millhaven; and most prominently, prisoners' rights.

A constant theme in the first eight issues is Prison Justice Day, an Odyssey Group initiative that has become a national tradition inside and outside Canada's penitentiaries.

PRISON JUSTICE DAY - AUGUST 10TH

Prison Justice Day (PJD) originated in Millhaven penitentiary on August 10, 1975 when the prisoners of that institution commemorated the first anniversary of the death of Eddie Nalon, who had committed suicide while in solitary confinement in Millhaven's SHU. This first observance took the form of a hunger strike and day of mourning. Another fast by six prisoners in Millhaven's SHU also began that day and lasted for eighteen days (Rye, 1979:4-6). By the following summer (1976) it had become an established memorial day; a day in which "prisoners pay tribute to the prisoners who have died in this country's prisons" (*Odyssey Newsletter*, 1979:8). It also came to

represent the demand for prisoners' rights, and was soon observed inside and outside Canada's penitentiaries. In the *Odyssey Newsletter's* (1978-79:16) farewell to Howie Brown, the initiation of PJD is largely attributed to him, although in a conversation with Rick Rye of *Tarpaper*, (Rye, 1979: 2-6), Brown credited Jack McNeil as co-founder. Brown's involvement stemmed in part from the fact that he was in the SHU at the time of Nalon's death. In 1978, after spending eight years in maximum security prisons in central Canada, much of it at Millhaven and in solitary confinement, Brown was transferred across the country to a maximum security prison in British Columbia. This and the numerous other involuntary transfers used by the Canadian Penitentiary Service to breakup Odyssey and prisoner solidarity at Millhaven inadvertently led to the expansion of this and other prisoner rights activities at that time.

Solidarity with the Millhaven prisoners' initiative was immediately forthcoming. The first formally defined PJD, August 10, 1976 generated support both inside and outside Canada's federal penitentiaries.

The prisoners of Millhaven from here on in will be known as the 100% ers' for that is what we gave on August 10th to the remembrance of our brothers... 100% support and respect. We congratulate our brothers and sisters in other prisons who supported our "one-day hunger fast" by their show of UNITY and compassion. Our support is growing and it can only continue to grow as long as we continue to struggle without faltering.... To the citizens who supported us and did so much to organize Prison Justice Day, our sincere and heartfelt thanks (*The Millhaven Momentum*, August, 1976:22).

Tightwire (May/June 1977: 28) reported 98% support for 1976 at Kingston Prison for Women, and the penal press throughout the country reported observances in their areas. While trying to play down the day, penal authorities provided testimony to the widespread support:

A spokesperson for the Canadian Penitentiary Service made it known that the hunger strike of those lodging in federal penitentiaries had no effect in the Maritimes and Western provinces, while prisoners in Quebec, Ontario and B.C.

seemed to have followed the strike in 95% of cases (*Le Devoir*, August 11, 1976 quoted in Brisson, 1983:2).

In Quebec, the Prisoners' Rights Committee of Montréal and the Human Rights League publicized the prisoners' appeals and its members also observed a day of fasting. In B.C., a coalition of prisoners' rights and feminist groups organized 24-hour vigils outside Okalla prison and British Columbia Penitentiary.

By August 10, 1977, inside support for PJD had spread to penitentiaries across the country, particularly in the large maximum security institutions. A spokesperson for the Canadian Penitentiary Service revealed that over 3000 members (1/3 of the federal prison population) had taken part (*Ibid.*), although the penal press reported greater support, including the maritime and prairie regions. However, not all federal prison populations yet supported the initiative, in part, because of the learned caution of survival, and in part, because of institutional penalties. Through the exhortations of prisoner activists and penal press writers this soon changed (e.g. see Smith, 1977:1). By 1979, virtually all federal maximum security prisons were solidly represented and the proportion of federal prisoners taking part continued to grow through 1981. This was paralleled by growing national recognition and support outside the prison walls. Claire Culhane's Prisoners' Rights Group of Vancouver, Marianne Rox, the Prisoners' Rights Group of Montréal and the Civil Liberties Association of Ottawa continued to provide publicity and organize major events in their areas, while smaller demonstrations of support sprang up in other cities. The Law Union organized Toronto's first public demonstration of support in 1978, and laid the basis for the tradition in that city. Increasingly, outside support took the form of vigils and demonstrations outside prisons, including press conferences and the presentation of briefs outlining prisoners' concerns and demands.

THE MEANING OF PRISON JUSTICE DAY

Together with Eddie Nalon, the Landers brothers came to symbolize the political nature and particular focus of PJD. In "A Comrade is Dead" (*Millhaven Momentum*, 1976: 8-9), Howie

Brown eulogized Bobby Landers as a leader of prisoners' struggles against oppression and for their rights. As a prisoner who had survived numerous attempts to 'break' him by using physical and psychological violence, Landers' death from a heart attack in Millhaven's SHU (resulting from a lack of medical attention) came to epitomize the focus of PJD. In reporting the inquest into Landers' death in *The Toronto Star*, N. Van Rijn states:

He entered Millhaven May 1, and on the morning of May 21, he was found on the floor of his cell, dead. He was in a segregation cell, designed to keep troublesome prisoners away from other inmates, because the prison director suspected him of pressing for prisoners' rights (Van Rijn, Sept. 28, 1976, quoted in *The Communicator* 1976:26-28).⁹

Van Rijn notes that in the previous year a coroner's inquest into the death of another prisoner had recommended the installation of an emergency call alarm system in the SHU. Such a system could have saved Bobby Landers' life. His death and subsequent PJD agitation forced CPS to install such a system.

Prison deaths continued unabated, and proper medical attention and diagnosis continued to be a focal point of prisoners' concerns. The January/February 1978 issue of *Tightwire* (46) printed a poem by a nineteen year old prisoner Isabella Fay Ogima, followed by the reprint of a newspaper report of her death. According to an editorial in the March/April, 1978 issue of *Tightwire*, Ogima died of acute hepatic failure and the editor charged that lack of proper medical diagnosis and treatment was the determining factor in her death. For prisoners, prison deaths symbolize their tenuous hold on life and their vulnerability to the vagaries of institutional control. Throughout its history, prison deaths have remained the central focus of this memorial day. The list of casualties continues to grow reflecting the poor quality of medical attention; the desperation of prisoners, especially in solitary confinement, who take their own lives; and the brutal repressive consequences of fulfilling custodial goals. In 1977, Glen Landers was shot to death trying to scale Millhaven's fences in an escape attempt, and ten years later, Sandy

Alexander Fitzpatrick was shot and killed by a tower guard at that institution. Peter Collins writes that:

Many men and women have died under what's known to be suspicious circumstances.... There have been many deaths, before and after Eddie Nalon's. More recent is the sad circumstances surrounding Alexander (Sandy) Fitzpatrick. Sandy was shot to death on October 14th, 1987 by a Correctional Officer at Millhaven Penitentiary.

Sandy was shot to death by a prison guard armed with an AR-15 assault rifle. A rifle that has a top firing rate of 650 rounds per minute. The Correctional Service of Canada equip these "high velocity" .223 caliber rifles with a "dum-dum" projectile, a form of ammunition that is designed to expand at a rapid rate upon entry. When this death dealing bullet entered Sandy's body, it tore his chest cavity to shreds, ensuring [sic] death.

It is more than a passing point of interest that this type of ammunition is outlawed by the U.N. for use in war. It is also illegal for hunting animals in Canada.

Every year on August 10th, we remember Eddie, and now Sandy, among the many men and women that have died while in (and at) the hands of the Correctional Services of Canada and for all the men and women that have died in or at the hands of other countries' prison services (*The Partisan*, July/August, 1988).

As Howie Brown writes on the occasion of PJD:

We do not intend to ever forget his [Eddie Nalon] dying, just like we do not intend to forget all of the other deaths that have taken place. That is what August 10th is all about. Remembering our friends, our comrades, our brothers and sisters who have died in prison...(*Odyssey Newsletter*, 1978:3).

The focus and demands of PJD have gone beyond memorials to those who have died and address the conditions that produce prison deaths, especially SHUs and solitary confinement. *The Odyssey Newsletter* (1979: 1) provides a list of demands that is indicative of this extension today:

**PRISON JUSTICE DAY, AUGUST 10TH,
1979 FOR THE END TO SENSELESS
DEATHS IN PRISONS. IN SUPPORT OF
HUMAN RIGHTS FOR PRISONERS.**

TO ATTAIN:

- THE RIGHT TO MEANINGFUL WORK WITH FAIR WAGES,
- THE RIGHT TO USEFUL EDUCATION AND TRAINING,
- THE RIGHT TO PROPER MEDICAL ATTENTION,
- THE RIGHT TO FREEDOM OF SPEECH AND RELIGION,
- THE RIGHT TO FREE AND ADEQUATE LEGAL SERVICES,
- THE RIGHT TO INDEPENDENT REVIEW OF ALL PRISON
DECISION MAKING AND CONDITIONS,
- THE RIGHT TO VOTE,¹⁰
- THE RIGHT TO FORM A UNION,
- THE RIGHT TO ADEQUATE WORK AND FIRE SAFETY
STANDARDS,
- THE RIGHT TO OPEN VISITS AND CORRESPONDENCE,
- THE RIGHT TO NATURAL JUSTICE AND DUE PROCESS

These demands have not changed substantially over the years (e.g. see *Cemetery Road*, August, 1983). In his column "Imaginary or Real," Myles Sartor captures the underlying meaning of PJD for many prisoners:

When trying to find the meaning of Prisoner's Justice Day we must seek beyond the symbol and find out what it represents. Prisoner's Justice Day presents on one level an act of solidarity, on another level it represents a period of remembrance in which past injustices within prisons become the focus of attention for a single day. On a higher level the most important aspect of Prisoner's Justice Day is that it symbolizes a way of life.

This means that within our caged existence we must continually be aware of the constant struggle for survival...(Sartor, 1983:3).

Above all, the original Odyssey Group initiative has transcended itself.

An idea had been born. An idea can't be put in solitary, tear gas doesn't faze it, a rubber truncheon swings right through an idea — missing everything. Besides, this particular idea had already broken out of prison and was running around the countryside knocking on doors, waking folks up. Lights were coming on all over the place. Wardens whispered worriedly, the prisoners were on to something. They refused all enticements, ignored all threats. They had seized their freedom simply by not participating in their imprisonment (“A Lesson in Freedom,” 1986:2).

NATIONAL PRISON JUSTICE DAY

As with most long-term political struggles, support for PJD has at times faltered. However, continuing deaths and incidents of overt repression have served to re-energize both inside and outside support. For example, the post-hostage taking brutality at Archambault penitentiary in 1982, (see Gosselin, 1982; Amnesty International, 1983), the waves of Native prisoners' suicides at Saskatchewan Penitentiary, the shooting death of Sandy Fitzpatrick at Millhaven (1987), and the continuing high suicide rates at Kingston Prison for Women (P4W) have served to bolster prisoner support in those institutions and regions. When prisoner support has waned, the urgings of politicized prisoners such as Gayle Horii (see Horii, 1988) and outside prison activists, like Claire Culhane in Vancouver and Jean-Claude Bernheim in Montréal, have stiffened the resolve and carried the day. In her letter to the editor of *The Partisan*, Claire Culhane writes:

Out this way, we didn't rate media coverage but we did our thing. A Rock Against Prisons concert on the Saturday at a people's park in downtown Vancouver and on the Sunday, a Cavalcade... to nine prisons to parade our variety of placards, such as REMEMBER OUR DEAD... END SOLITARY CONFINEMENT NOW... NO MORE CAGES... and so on.

While some prisoners are writing to deplore the lack of support shown N.P.J.D. in their particular joint, what really matters is that IT HAS BEEN HAPPENING FOR THIRTEEN YEARS AND IT IS STILL HAPPENING — as it will continue to happen somewhere if not everywhere for the next thirteen times 13 years... and THAT'S WHAT COUNTS (*The Partisan*, Nov/Dec., 1988).

And the support continues. For example, Eugene Turnbull in "The Editor's Desk" (*The Partisan*, Sept/Oct. 1988:1) notes massive support in the Ontario region in 1988; 100% in Millhaven, Collins Bay and Joyceville, and 80% in P4W and Warkworth.

Outside support has also been maintained, with the Prisoners' Rights Groups of Vancouver and Montréal leading the way. By 1981, the Prisoners' Rights Office of Montréal had garnered the support of twenty popular, union and political groups in Quebec (Bisson, 1983:5). In 1983 they reported that they had extended PJD internationally, receiving support and publicity from the Paris radio station *Frequence Libre*.

Various demonstrations were to take place in France to mark August 10. In Paris on August 9, *Frequence Libre* broadcast an evening devoted to the commemoration day with the participation of Jean-Claude Bernheim of the PRO, the secretary for prison affairs of the International Human Rights Federation. Outside Lille prison the Committee For Action in Support of Prisoners' Demands laid a wreath and observed a minute of silence in memory of all prisoners who had died in prison. (*Ibid.*:7)

At the tenth anniversary memorial in Vancouver (1986), the developing international attention was evident with messages of solidarity arriving from the U.S.A., Australia, Holland, England and Scotland (*Kent Times*, 1986:3).

CONCLUSION

In examining PJD as the most outstanding of the numerous accomplishments of the Odyssey Group, I am struck by the impossibility of what they achieved. Even CSC has finally capitulated. After years of harassment of those prisoners who took part in PJD, including the loss of privileges and 'good' time for the general prison participants,²¹ and segregation and kidnapping (*i.e.*, involuntary transfers) for the leadership, in 1988 the senior management committee of CSC decided to eliminate the practice of issuing 'performance notices', although those who refused to work were still docked a day's pay (*Tightwire*, 1988:15). Some members of Odyssey are on the street and

doing well, some are still doing time. Prison violence and prisoners' deaths continue. Last month (March, 1991), ten women in the segregation unit of Kingston Prison for Women engaged in a hunger strike in response to the suicides of six Native prisoners in the past eighteen months and the institution's repression of the prison population's grief and anger.

Aboriginal women inside the prison have endured not only the violence and oppression a patriarchal society forces on women, but also the genocidal campaigns of our white supremacist state in its attempts to conquer the Indigenous peoples of Turtle Island. The resistance of Feb. 6 (1991) was a response among the Native women and their sisters inside the walls to the death just days before of their sister and the racist and vile attempts of the prisoncrats to blame the death on Native women and on the Native services which elders provide (*Through The Walls*, "Press Release", March 6, 1991).

Last week (March, 1991) two men at Saskatchewan Penitentiary were shot to death by guards during a hostage taking standoff. The C.B.C. national news coverage of this 'event' showed the 'triumphant' prison guards responsible for the deaths sharing high-fives in the prison yard in the immediate aftermath of the killings. Certainly George Jackson's view of prison employees remains valid for Canada's gulags as attested to by the shooting death of Sandy Fitzpatrick in 1989, and the recent killings at Saskatchewan penitentiary.

Anyone who can pass the civil service examination today can kill me tomorrow. Anyone who passed the civil service examination yesterday can kill me today with complete immunity (Jackson, 1971:6).

Although prison disturbances and violent reactions to overt and life threatening repression still occur, Odyssey provided a new model for politicized non-violent responses to the degradation and destruction of prison life. National Prison Justice Day epitomizes this new politicized way of thinking. By commemorating PJD, the struggles and sacrifices of those who came before are recognized. The Odyssey Group's success in creating this national forum for public education on criminal justice and corrections issues also provides encouragement and

strength to those who engage in prison-focused struggles both inside and outside the walls. In an interview for *Kent Times* with Jack McCann and Bobby Paul on PJD, Steve Reid provides a sense of the meaning of those past struggles and their accomplishments.

KT: As a survivor of long years in solitary — as chronicled in *Prisoners of Isolation* — how do you look back on those times of heavy prison-prisoner confrontations?

JM: Guys don't realize the fury, the anger, the bitterness. The pain that a lot of guys put out to achieve some change. I mean we were hurt. We were hurt.

KT: So August 10th symbolizes the cost of achieving change?

JM: Exactly. I remember the cost.

BP: The hole. There's a good example right there. Now you can smoke. You get your meals. Look how many years were spent on bread and water. Not too long ago neither. That's something that came about because of the guys who were sacrificed. The guys who died, the other guys who spent years in solitary being labelled ringleaders. The younger guys don't realize it, they [the Canadian Penitentiary Service] or nobody didn't just come along and say "hey, we better change this." It was changed because it was brought to people's attention with blood, literally with blood. Then they changed it (*Kent Times*, 1986:17).

The types of political activities in which the Odyssey Group, PJD, and prisoners' public education have engaged remain major means of effecting such changes.

*Dedicated to the memory of Billy Asham who died in
The Hole in Saskatchewan Penitentiary in 1971.*

ENDNOTES

1. See for example R.S. Ratner and B. Cartwright (1990). Their argument denigrates prisoner politics and in doing so represents many of the problems associated with a variety of academic criminology and social science discourses which deny political credibility to prisoners' struggles. For a broader discussion see Gaucher (1988). For an analysis of the Canadian Penal Press see Gaucher (1989).
2. See for example *The Telescope* (1955-59) or *Transition* (1955-59) for prisoners' critiques of the faulty promises of the new post-war prison reform movement.
3. In the aftermath of The Kingston Penitentiary riot (1971), prisoners transferred to the newly opened Millhaven Penitentiary were forced to run a gauntlet upon entering the institution, and were then subjected to years of violent repression. See J.W. Swackhammer (1973); MacGuigan (1976); G. McNeil and S. Vance (1978).
4. See *Quarter Century News* (1973-74).
5. For a clear statement of this, see R. Van Bree 1979: 7-9.
6. See for example *Odyssey Newsletter* 1978, (5): 42-43.
7. A penal press convention dating from this time is the creation of magazines that commence or recommence publication with an August issue commemorating Prison Justice Day. See for example *Cemetery Road* (1983); *Kent Times* (1986) 1:1; *The Partisan* (1988).
8. For a discussion of this specific problem, see *Odyssey Newsletter* 1979: 4. For a general discussion of the censorship and obstruction of the Newsletter, see 1978: 63; 1979: 26, 2-6; 1981: 32-4; 1982: 13. These are dominant themes throughout the history of the penal press.
9. Also see R.K. Yellowbird, "Death!! Suicide or Public Execution" in *Millhaven Momentum* (1976:34-38), which extends this political connection in a discussion of a series of deaths at Saskatchewan Penitentiary.
10. A recent decision (January, 1991) of the Canadian Federal Court recognized prisoners' right to vote in federal elections. This decision has been appealed by the Justice Department.

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