

Editors' Introduction

Bob Gaucher

At our editorial board meeting last spring in Vancouver, Howard Davidson requested that someone else take over the general responsibilities of editor, while he would devote his efforts to distribution. We decided on a co-editorship of Bob Gaucher, John Lowman, and Brian MacLean. This is simply a reorganization of group responsibilities and will not essentially change the outlook and format of the Journal. We would like to thank Howard for his important contributions toward establishing the format, spirit, and, indeed, the *JPP* itself.

At ICOPA II in Amsterdam (1985) and ICOPA III in Montreal (1987), Howard and I noticed and discussed the absence of prisoners' and former prisoners' contributions to the prison abolition movement's discourse. Consequently we thought that a *JPP*, with an analytical focus and scholarly format, could help to create that presence within academic and activist discourse, or at least within ICOPA. The involvement of grassroots prisoners' support groups at Montreal, and prisoners at ICOPA V in Bloomington, Indiana (1991), may have produced a false impression, for there are still few prisoners' accounts, analyses, or proposals within the prison abolitionist literature.

However, some gains have been made and the signs tell us that the *JPP* is on the right path. The current conjunction of postmodern and feminist theory and analyses within the mainstream academy's production of knowledge has resulted in a new, heightened interest in the accounts of the oppressed. Furthermore, these accounts now have greater epistemological credibility and general legitimacy within scholarly discourses. In the UK, a 'writers in residence' program in some prisons has further increased the interest in prisoners' accounts in that country.¹ Furthermore, in Canada, Britain, and the United States, a new form of the penal press has developed outside the walls and beyond the censorship powers of the prison. These developments are all congruent with the goals of the *JPP*.

Our policy of publishing only prisoners' analyses and commentaries needs some clarification. While we do not generally publish fiction or poetry, we do consider manuscripts written in a stylized or lyrical form, such as Michael P. Smith's 'The Order of Things' in this issue. In Volume 4, Number 2, Little Rock Reed illustrates how poems can be used to forward or supplement analysis.

One of the understandings upon which the *JPP* is built is that by operating outside prisons and without state subsidies of any sort, we would achieve autonomy from the control and censorship of prison and

state officials. To guard against comebacks against our contributors, the *JPP* accepts the need to publish some articles anonymously or under a pseudonym. This year two instances of contributors being harassed, at least in part because of their articles in the *JPP*, have come to our attention.

Little Rock Reed's situation is fully aired in the *Response* section of this issue, by Deborah Garlin. Little Rock's narrow escape from the dangers of Lucasville are underlined in the first-hand account of 'Sunday Bloody Sunday.' We chose to publish this account essentially as it was written in mid-April. Rather than addressing some of his conjecture, the inclusion of this post-riot account captures the horror and fear that rages through a prison during a riot and siege, and the believability of the rumours serve to illustrate and emphasize this atmosphere. Can any reasonable person doubt Little Rock's wisdom in avoiding such a fate?

In Florida, Gerald Niles did not have long to wait before receiving his reward for contributing "Submission, Subservience, 'Model Inmates,' and the Fear Factor: Observations from a Sweet Kamp down Florida Way" to the last volume. He provides the following postscript:

Five days after Captain Leroy Benton confiscated and fumed over *JPP* Vol. 4, No. 2 (1993), reinforcing the truth and core of that essay, I was on the bus and out of the Sweet Kamp at Avon Park, doomed to Dungeon Hardee.

I was thrown into the hole upon arrival. They let me out for the month of May, long enough to be sunburned from overexposure, to be assaulted and robbed in plain view of the guards who turned their heads and denied that anything had happened, to preach the gospel of prisoners' rights, and then back to the hole for 'investigation.' I was charged and found guilty of posing a threat to security and order, held for 103 days, then released when they figured out they could not jail my spirit. Immediately, I commenced with full-scale resistance. The regime responded by allowing an attempted sexual assault which, I'm sad to report, I repelled with violence. I confronted staff conspirators; they deny it happened. Now I ponder whether there is a peaceable way to plough out of an assassination plot that may be planned.

In the previous essay we defined 'Sweet Kamps' as places where all manner of indecency (such as alcohol, drugs, sexual deviance, and violence) may be indulged in with minimal interference by prison officials. *Voilà* Dungeon Hardee. Next stop may be Hell.

Dungeon Hardee has the typical control unit layout, in every logistic phase of its classical mismanagement of operations as well as its architectural design. Any housing unit is easily converted into total lockdown, and these happen, to some extent, on a daily basis – dry runs. Disorganization is to the prisoners' detriment, but anything that goes wrong is classed as "the inmate's fault." It is a pass-the-buck cesspool when it comes to accountability. I have learned the first two Commandments of the Florida Chain Gang: 1). *Thou shalt not make sense*; 2). *Thou shalt take the blame for anything wrong*.

While atrocious acts may be committed, even condoned, those are misdemeanors, largely ignored, including mutilation, rape, maiming, rob-

bery, etc. Felonies are strictly policed; every button buttoned, every shirt tucked in, overdue library books, every individual degraded by petty harassment. Division of unity is encouraged by indifference, but any 'crime' against DOC carries the maximum penalty. Any dissent, of course, is a capital offence.

Control? Efforts to dehumanize totally are blatantly apparent. We are forced to wear the same clothing, in identical style; to have the same white middle-class haircuts and clean-shaven faces; to eat the same 'food' at the same time; to watch the same TV channel and to hear it, even if we don't want to; to sleep simultaneously, so long as it doesn't interfere with the sleep-deprivation aspect of the programming ... This joint is completely out of control.

The Assistant Superintendent recently admitted that idleness of the population was at 'unconstitutional proportions' (maybe he was referring to his own inaction). There is not enough work or educational opportunity, and there are no jobs that pay, since Florida capitalizes on the Slave Labour Clause of the Thirteenth Amendment. Peanuts for brains don't belong in the heads of prisoncrats. I wonder who performed the lobotomies, and I pray for Abolition.

The *JPP* can do little more than bring to attention the harassments contributors receive, as much as we might want to rescue someone. We salute those who write in the face of repression, and advise caution.

In this volume, prison writers also raise a number of other issues. Victor Hassine questions the fairness and equality of a criminal justice system that operates like an industry whose *raison d'être* is the profitable employment of its brotherhoods of police, courts, and prisoncrats. He illustrates how issues of innocence and responsibility are lost in the processes of this type of criminal just-us. Michael Ross, writing from death row in Connecticut, presents a moving argument against the degradation and unconscionable nature of state executions. In doing so, he adds emphasis to the importance of Hassine's questions. Joseph McCormick discusses the opportunities currently available to prisoners in federal penitentiaries in Canada as means of surviving the stultifying and destructive regime of prison life. Roy Glaremin's analysis highlights sections of the new Canadian Prison and Parole Act that open windows of opportunity for prisoners to regain some control over their living conditions and their lives.

We would like to welcome Robert Bryden and Gayle Horii to the editorial board. Gayle and Liz Elliott are working on a future issue on women in prison. I would like to thank Marian Crow for the hard work, effort and advice she contributed to the copy editing and production of this issue.

NOTES

- 1 So far, many of the publications resulting from this program have been representative mainly of the 'writers in residence,' their encounters with the dark solitude and brutality of the prison, and only secondarily those of prisoners.