

VICTORIAN PRISONERS ACTION COMMITTEE

Write to: Prisoners' Action Committee, P.O. Box 114,
East Brunswick, 305/. Phone:479 2977

'Dear Editors,

I just received the second issue of the journal. Thanks for publishing my paper.

I think this issue was better than the first as it was less academic than the first. In my opinion, it is necessary to ask "What effect is (x) having on the prisoners' struggle?" before one can ascertain the value of any activity or publication or whatever devoted to prison reform. Often people such as myself (from student backgrounds) tend to look for intrinsic value in journals, leaflets, etc. The real question of course is not whether such-and-such an article or paper is inherently sound but whether the effect of the ideas in the paper or article is positive or negative. I think the second issue of the journal will be more successful in terms of giving prisoners encouragement and confidence in their struggle against unjust oppression. The test will always be practice and the verification of our ideas will only come from the actual struggles of the prisoners themselves.

If I may make a constructive criticism of the journal it's this: I believe it should be more agitational in nature. The report on the recent struggles in NSW was excellent in this respect. But the theme, the general orientation, still seems too academic in my opinion. This is only my opinion but I hope you will convey it to the editorial board for their consideration.

Our Group has been inspired by your efforts and by the efforts of a London-based prison action group to produce a bulletin every two months. We call it "Prisoners' Voice" and it will go to prisoners in a few Victorian gaols. The first issue will be ready in January and the material is very good standard. I will send you as many copies as you would like. Don't worry about subscriptions, it is my pleasure to send you some because I know your group will make good use of them. Unfortunately, the quality of production is not too good - it will be a gestetner job with an offset printed cover.

If you want to reprint any parts of it in your journal please do so. We would like acknowledgement if you do. Anyway, you will receive a copy in January.

Thanks also for printing the article on O'Meally. Our campaign for his freedom was rejuvenated on December 11 when the Governor of Victoria exercised the Royal Prerogative and freed three convicted murderers - a child rapist-murderer who did 21 years; a woman rapist-murderer who did 16 years and a murderer of a man during a robbery who did 16 years. Yet Bill O'Meally, now in his 24th year, still rots. None of the three did any time in 'H' Division. We issued a press statement calling for O'Meally's release in light of this, and we received excellent coverage from radio, TV, and the Herald newspaper. I have a couple of poems by Bill O'Meally - would they be suitable for the journal? Let me know please.

I think the comments in the editorial were unfair to me, especially the inference that I seek a mirror-image of the existing society. I do support the abolition of prisons but to me, the long-term is a period which is definable in terms of one's life-time. We will not see the abolition of prisons in our life-time just as we will not see the abolition of the State or classes in our life-time. In other words, we will never live under communism in our life-time. This does not mean that I don't support the aim of a classless society (the only type of social structure which would not need prisons). When I speak of the long-term aim I mean an aim which is long-term in relation to my life-time. I know that prisons will be liberated in Australia sometime during my life. This will be an active event, involving literally smashing down of walls and armed struggle inside and outside against repressive authorities and guards. It will come about as part of a general revolutionary struggle against imperialism and for national independence. It worries me that academics always put me down for wanting liberation and not abolition of prisons, when what they are saying has no practical implications in terms of their life. Talking about something as distant and utopian as abolition of prisons is just speaking hot-air. I suspect that those who hesitate when the concept of liberation is posed, hesitate because they sense that it will be a long-term reality and that is a concept which would necessitate active, sacrificing, involvement on their part.

Anyway, enough of that, I'm grateful that you publish my material.

Best wishes for the New Year to you and the group,

Fraternally yours, Barry