Annihilation Zone[1]

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Turning the prison into a shining trench of combat



> "What though the field be lost? All is not lost; the unconquerable Will, And study of revenge, immortal hate, And the courage never to submit or yield."

—Milton

> "In pitch darkness, just before dawn the owners of darkness came for us once again. . . . We knew fascism on its death bed would attack us in a more frantic manner and ask us to surrender, but has anyone ever seen us surrender to them?"

—A woman Communist prisoner/combatant in Turkey

Anyone calling themselves a Communist should understand certain aspects about the repressive apparatus of the old decaying State, which in its desperation has already prepared cells for us. I do not wish to degrade the reader with cynicism; on the contrary we must seek to embody the basic principles of Mao: that it is right to rebel, to be attacked by the enemy is a good thing, and we must turn a thing into its opposite.

[1] https://struggle-sessions.com/2018/07/19/annihilation-zone/

Prison in this context is reversed, used as a weapon against the blackest of enemies. The prisons of the State then become schools of revolutionary warfare. For the purpose of this article we will rely on the firsthand experiences of Communist prisoners in Peru, Turkey, and the US as well as some documented history.

The purpose of the prison system almost anywhere in the world is not simply "profit." Discourse on US prison systems tends to over focus on this "for-profit" status as the determinant factor. A careful analysis of State and private prisons reveals that as businesses they are not profitable in themselves to the bourgeoisie as a whole. Marxists correctly understand prison as the repressive apparatus of the bourgeois State, and Marxists have accumulated a wealth of experience in this measure, countless of us have filled bourgeois dungeons in every country where workers have grasped the red flag. Since prisons, including those that utilize slave labor for imperialist corporations, are not profit-making machines in and of themselves, they must be understood mainly as *annihilation zones,* counterrevolutionary safeguards, invaluable tools in both national oppression and exploitation of the proletariat. Some comrades in the US have not fully begun considering prison as an inevitable for lots of us. This lack of consideration is both incorrect and delusional.

It is correct to expose (and be outraged at) the fact that there are owners of private prisons who literally become multi-millionaires. It is also true that they are not rich on the basis of *profitability* in terms of what the slave labor in these zones produces economically. Private or so-called for-profit prisons actually make the majority of their money from government financing and huge compensation packages. Getting rich off repression is merely a fringe benefit, not the fundamental purpose or aim of prisons. While a factory with paid workers is objectively more profitable, enslaved prison labor offers something the factory cannot—uninhibited white terror, echoing the Nazi-type concentration camp. This is a powerful weapon on the psychology of the people, especially the colonized people and revolutionary or potentially revolutionary masses.

Prisons are annihilation zones: first, to subdue and eradicate sections of the population, and second, to store the unwanted cast-offs of society. Bourgeois prisons, unless they are organized by revolutionaries as a school for all prisoners—a people's school—remain schools for crime, carrying out their role in declassing sections of the population.

The genocidal bowl

To carry out annihilation the prison relies on shock and awe as well as a constant static dehumanization. The Peruvian women revolutionaries of the Communist Party of Peru referred to the lunchtime meal provided by the prison as "the genocidal bowl." Its purpose was to simultaneously destroy both the health and the morale of the

prisoner. This meal was mainly old millet and bugs in a soupy liquid. It should come as no surprise that in imperialist countries the genocidal bowl takes on an only slightly different form but in essence remains the same and functions the same.

Regulations are supposed to be imposed to safeguard nutritional or at least caloric content; however, enforcement is lackadaisical, and in most cases the private companies contracted to prison facilities have produced little more than an unknown gruel of some processed vegetable protein in glue-like gravy. Anyone who's spent a few days in US county jails can recall what might as well be called the genocidal bag, processed cold "meat" and a stale slice of bread. In certain jails in the early 90s bags would be passed out with a brick/powder-like substance that was nothing but the minimum nutritional content ground up and processed into an unknown dish. This cake-like substance was served for every meal in the jails and prisons in Arizona (still to this day reminiscent of the Nazi regime), in the occupied Chicano Nation. But diet is only the first avenue of assault on the health of prisoners entering the system. More brutality is carried out in the form of dentistry, where the preferred treatment for the butchers they call dentists is the removal of any problem tooth; no other form of treatment is even considered, resulting in what should be considered long-term mutilation of temporary prisoners. The general "healthcare" provided by the prisons and jails is no better.

Since incarceration is not profitable but necessary to inflict white terror on the population the annihilation zone must compensate in other ways, by selling contracts to other private companies in the form of marked-up commissary. It's not unheard of to pay a $1 or 75 cents for a bag of dehydrated noodle soup that costs 5–10 cents at a supermarket. This sharpens the role of the genocidal bowl and focuses its harm against the poorest. In US prisons this drives unaffiliated non-lumpen worker prisoners into the clutches of prison gangs. Prison gangs are the most pure expression of the lumpenproletariat in the US. Due mainly to crisis conditions, they have come around to be a most useful asset to the bourgeois State, and are both victims of the State and terrorists in the service of it. They are the fascist or fascistic shock troops of reaction inside the walls. They enforce bourgeois order with a merciless cruelty far surpassing the ability of the guards to prevent rebellion. The black-market prison economy relies on a lack of rebellion, as well as favorable guards who seek to profit from gang alliances through the proliferation of drug addiction. To maintain their fascist rule the lumpen gangs use rape, murder, and extortion, most often with the open and closed collusion of guards.

For revolutionaries prison exists to isolate us, always aiming to break our spirits. This is perfectly expressed in the Turkish F-type prisons. The F-type prison was constructed specifically for revolutionary prisoners, who are abundant in that country due to both

US imperialism and the fascist AKP government. While the older prisons operated on a dormitory model, where those captured and kidnapped by the State lived with about 50 others, the new F-type prisons divide the prisoners mainly into single cells and sometimes into three-person cells. F-types became the norm in 1991 when the fascist "Anti-terror Law" was passed, requiring that revolutionary prisoners have no contact with other prisoners.

F-type prisons did not emerge as an original idea from the Turkish fascists; they go back to German fascists post-WWII in West Germany. The West German government was populated by former SS officers and fascist politicians, fascist heads of industry now forced into collaboration with US imperialism. Here modernized solitary confinement (sensory deprivation) in the form of the Stammheim Model was first developed in its use against Communist prisoners of the Red Army Faction in the 1970s. This model used by the fascist West German State would be adapted and adopted throughout the world as a model of the modern prison. As the West German fascists learned to put down urban guerrilla movements they developed one of the most fine-tuned repressive apparatuses of the modern bourgeois State. The authors of *The Red Army Faction: A Documentary History*, J. Smith and Andre Moncourt, describe the Stammheim Model succinctly: "The mere incarceration of the guerrilla was insufficient. Those captured were to be rendered ineffective not only as combatants, but also as spokespeople for the Anti-imperialist resistance. *They were to be deconstructed as human beings and reconstructed as representatives of the counter-insurgency project.* If this was not possible, at a bare minimum they were to be destroyed" (emphasis ours). Eventually the fascists would meet their objective with the well-organized assassination of all the ideological leaders of the RAF and the subsequent cover-up. This was made possible largely due to the failures of the RAF in establishing a Party, or united front, as well as their incorrect military strategy, which failed to apply the principles of Protracted People's War in urban conditions.

It is critical to comprehend that in times of crisis—as well sometimes in times of peace— that even in a bourgeois democracy revolutionaries lack judicial rights, which are only presented as a formality—a façade. There is no end to laws and bills that seek to eliminate said façade as the democratic mask begins to slip, revealing the fascist ambitions of the State. We must also observe that what is actually carried out is often not in accordance with bourgeois law. This is most evident with the level of repression used against the Black Nation generally and their most advanced revolutionary expressions particularly. The prison assassination of George Jackson of the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense bears similarity to the assassinations of the RAF leaders. Both anti-people actions were covered up on the pretense that the prisoners had smuggled in guns and radios, which was impossible in the conditions of isolation.

In light of all this, prisoner support is not enough. Mass work must be carried out by organized revolutionaries to popularize the causes of revolutionary prisoners, and the task of securing a mass base against incarceration must be taken seriously. In short revolution is the answer to both mass incarceration and the repression of revolutionaries. If our incarceration is inevitable so too must be our triumph.

Knowing that prison is unavoidable for many US revolutionaries, we must sharpen our understanding of what to expect and prepare ourselves mentally and ideologically for the task of taking up posts in the US prisons, embodying the principles of the International Communist Movement by turning the black dungeons of reaction into shining trenches of combat.

Shining trenches of combat

> "But now with the living conditions deteriorating, and with the sure knowledge that we are slated for destruction, we have been transformed into an implacable army of liberation"

—George Jackson

> "The political prisoners of the Communist Party of Peru have years of experience with the repressive apparatus of the old Peruvian State and have drawn many lessons in order to resist and continue fighting, even under worse conditions. Because of this, and in accordance with what the Party and Chairman Gonzalo have taught us, we convert the black dungeons of reaction into shining trenches of combat."

—Comrade Inez of the Communist Party of Peru

In 1983 a red banner was draped over the wall of Peru's island prison El Fronton. In open rebellion of the fact that red items were banned in Peruvian prisons, the banner also was adorned with a hammer and sickle. It read:

"To the revolutionary prisoners of the US!, we are prisoners of El Fronton, a sinister concentration camp where Peru's reactionaries, with daily torture, liquidation, and assassination, are attempting to fulfill their dreams of breaking our revolutionary will and thus strike back at the glorious development of our guerrilla war which today is marching vigorously and surely toward the Conquest of Revolutionary Base Areas. From here, comrades, from El Fronton, a filthy reactionary dungeon which we have converted into a frontline trench, we send our warmest greetings and support to the

heroic revolutionary prisoners of the US, who right in the belly of the beast have dared and still dare to stand up in rebellion.

Comrades, this May 1 unites us more firmly with all the world's revolutionaries, to continue in combat until the international proletariat storms the heavens, with the immortal slogan, 'proletarians of all countries unite!'"

In prison conditions, the fight for dignity is in essence a political fight. This desire for dignity is the spark that, when cultivated by revolutionaries and principally the Party, will ignite the prairie fire inside the prisons. There are countless areas in which the revolutionary prisoner can unite and organize when in general population and countless other ways in which revolutionary prisoners can resist and fight back.

In such Peruvian prisons as the one described above, the prisons were transformed, average prisoners attended Communist-led schools where they studied the classics of Marxism-Leninism-Maoism. In this respect the imprisoned masses became militants. Coming to recognize the leadership of Communist prisoners and the Communist Party, this type of prison-based mass work not only improved the fighting capacity of those incarcerated but strengthened the authority of the Party.

The prisons—once crime dens for the downcast where gangsters ruled, and prostitution, drugs, and gambling were the only pastimes aside from forced labor—were transformed. They became a place for military drills, systematized criticism and self-criticism, parades, plays, and small crafts workshops that produced items smuggled out by family members of prisoners and sold to support the People's War. Food brought in by family members was communalized and malnutrition was fought against with socialist principles.

According to the prisoners themselves, the most common question, "How is this possible?" is always met with the response, "Through revolutionary optimism!" Faith in the masses provides this revolutionary optimism, the greatest weapon that the political prisoners have. No matter the assaults, rapes, and murders women Communist Party members in Peru faced, they pressed on stating that they were the "worthy daughters of Chairman Gonzalo," unbowed, inspirations to our class and staunch examples of how to do time. Their attitude was summed up by Comrade Inez: "We are prepared to be part of the price that must be paid [in making revolution]."

The revolutionary prisoners in Peru as well as those in Turkey know that they have only one real sentence—victory of the international proletarian revolution, of which all true Communists are a part. With this understanding, that we are condemned to win, all prison becomes transitory.

Revolutionaries in the shining trenches of combat, come together to celebrate revolutionary holidays that break with the old prison culture. Prison has its own unique culture, its own unwritten laws and codes; these are most often in place to reinforce the reactionary hierarchy that terrorizes the average working-class prisoner. Regionally in US prisons guards are called "boss," which is simultaneously submissive and rebellious by invoking a term used by slaves on plantations when speaking directly to overseers. Such subdued rebellions are as commonplace as they are subtle. The upkeep of good hygiene, like the preservation of dignity, is another subtle way in which prisoners quietly rebel, and at times a lack of hygiene is cause for violent correction between prisoners. These cultural norms have a dual nature: On one hand they are necessary to preserve the dignity that has been taken away, to fight back even a little bit against the filthy conditions beyond our control. On the other hand they serve the reproduction of block law and reinforcement of the capitalist social relationships mutated by confinement. Men are at times feminized by being assigned reproductive labor tasks at the hands of a gestapo on the block. Like the claiming of revolutionary holidays, political prisoners en masse will transform such conditions with consistent mass work, bringing dignity back to those who have been robbed of it and socializing the reproductive labor and enforcing revolutionary discipline against lumpen discipline.

The mindset of the revolutionary prisoner is the mindset of revolution—it does not bend, bow, or break; it rises in a torrent and fury to plant its red flag firmly at the highest point, even in hell. The revolutionary has one driving thought, which is not to survive or to get out, but to win, to win for the people and their Party.

Many of the prisoners in the federal system are informants, and everyone, including the informants, are worried about being informed on. These snitch codes will be undone at the frustration of the reactionary State. This alone will cripple their investigation and arrest quotas. This speaks volumes about the major departments of federal law enforcement and their elaborate snitch networks. Revolutionaries will end this through organizing inside and harming these enemy agencies. I of course am not suggesting this will happen at once, but in the wave-like advances and retreats of the revolutionary project—in class struggle.

The power of People's War in combatting the repressive apparatus of the State

Communists, as revolutionary optimists, must be mindful of our history and never give in to the fearfulness that the threat of incarceration imposes. We must instead place our drive toward the initiation of People's War, and our energy toward all the work that is required in accomplishing this. An international press article from the *Atlantic* in

1984 reported that "approximately 150 'delinquents' [the PCP] blacked out Ayacucho City, the capital of the department. Firing automatic weapons stolen from the police and using Inca slingshots (called huaracas) to hurl dynamite, they overran the city's maximum-security prison. There they sang revolutionary hymns, raised red flags, and freed all 247 prisoners."

The heights of the People's War in Peru saw the judges wearing hoods to conceal their identities as they passed judgment on anyone suspected of being revolutionaries, testimony to the fact that with popular support nothing is impossible and the State itself is forced to hide its most vile representatives due to fear of the very people they claim to represent.

We should also grapple with the fact that the revolutionary forces in our country will suffer arrest in the period of establishing a mass base, and when this happens the captured revolutionary becomes a rallying point for the cause itself. Because of this revolutionaries and would-be-revolutionaries must necessarily undergo and ideological tempering. We must take on the kind of spirit that is seen throughout our most advanced struggles.

To exemplify this point we can look at heroic figures like Felix Dzerzhinsky, who spent many years in various Polish prisons and on the outbreak of WWI was transferred with all political prisoners to Russia proper, where the Tsarist guards savagely beat him, permanently disfiguring his mouth and jaw. More than once when he was hospitalized the doctors/butchers threatened to amputate his limbs and held him in torturous restrictive chains. Throughout all of this, Comrade Dzerzhinsky maintained a revolutionary attitude and held fast to revolutionary optimism. Although he would not be freed until the victory of the proletariat in 1917 his resolve remained—revolution was an all-consuming affair far bigger than him as an individual human being.

He remarked, "It is necessary to instill in the masses our own confidence in the inevitable bankruptcy of evil, so that they will be left with no doubt, so that they will come through this moment in serried ranks, prepared for battle. This is the task of the theoreticians. But the tasks of the others are to lay bare and show up this evil, to lay bare the sufferings and torments of the masses and of the individual fighters torn from their midst by the enemy, to give them the meaning they actually have and which gives them the strength to bear everything courageously, without wavering. Only in this way is it possible to instill in the masses courage and understanding of the need for struggle."

Understanding that there is no true freedom for the oppressed under capitalism, imperialism, and national oppression the comrade beautifully stated, "I have matured in prison in torments of solitude, in torments of longing for the world and for life.

And, in spite of this, doubt in the justness of our cause has never risen in my heart. And now, when perhaps for many years all hope is buried in torrents of blood, when they have been crucified on the gallows, when many thousands of fighters for freedom are languishing in dungeons or thrown out into snowbound Siberia—I feel proud. Already I see tremendous masses set in motion shattering the old system, masses among whom new forces are being trained for fresh struggles. I feel proud that I am with them, that I see, feel and understand them, and that I, too, have suffered much together with them. It is sometimes hard, at times even terrible, here in prison. . . . Yet, if I had to begin life all over again, I would begin it in the same way. And not out of a sense of duty, not because I had to. For me, it is an organic necessity. . . . I curse neither my fate nor the many years in prison, for I know that all this is necessary in order to destroy the other vast prison which lies outside the walls of this horrible 'pavilion.' This is not idle philosophizing, not cold calculation, but the result of an indomitable desire for freedom, for a full life. Out there, comrades and friends are drinking our health, and I, alone in my cell, am thinking of them: may they live on, may they forge the weapons and be worthy of the cause for which the struggle is being waged."

What is evidenced by these quotes is the viewpoint everyone calling themselves Communist must adopt, as well as the simple historic fact that the then-untheorized People's War being waged by the Bolsheviks would ultimately bring about liberation. Again we Communists must be willing to pay the toll of passage from one mode of production to the next, a quota of blood must be filled, and we must fill it, even if this means we throw at this system the very best children of the proletariat. This is not a call to neglect risk assessment and sober judgement regarding action; this is not a call to go to prison over nothing. In fact I believe that it is precisely though resistance at all stages that clear fighters of the people emerge and are tempered to weather any horrible condition and transform what is designed to be demoralizing and crippling into broadening and deepening political campaigns. We should resist arrest, and at the same time fear no arrest and fear no prison. We should insist upon the reality that life under capitalism for the majority of the most oppressed is already a prison-like environment, and that liberation comes in the form of guns wielded by the Party leading People's War.

The demons of nightmare capitalism will gnaw at the minds of unresolved, but as surely as they will try they will fail to penetrate the thoughts of tempered revolutionaries.

This article and the subject matter can be fairly difficult, but inspiration comes from our beloved, unbreakable comrades who find themselves political prisoners, past, present, and future. For Chairman Gonzalo, the world's foremost political prisoner. For Musa Asoglu, imprisoned by the German State, being threatened with US imperialist extradi-

tion. For Igor Mendes true son of the proletariat, imprisoned by the old decaying state of Brazil. For Comrade Dallas, Maoist political prisoner in the US facing continued State repression. For all revolutionary prisoners of the world who are too numerous to list, and especially those who are part of People's Wars led by Maoist Parties. We support you, and we will continue our work in your example. As you take up your difficult post inside the dungeons of the ruling class, we must hold firm to ours in the broader prison of capitalist society.

*note from the editors, we have eliminated all mention of the right-liquidationist faction from Turkey and do not express solidarity with traitors. While we condemn the fascist state for incarcerating anyone, it is wrong to promote revisionists.