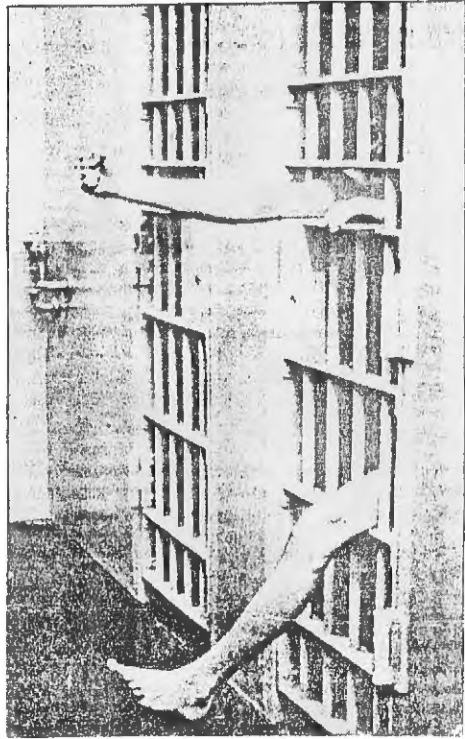


# ATTACKING PRISONS AT THE POINT OF PRODUCTION: A BRIEF LOOK AT MILITANT ACTIONS AGAINST THE PRISON-INDUSTRIAL COMPLEX

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**“The prisoners of democracy are not only contesting the prison policies of one government, but are openly challenging the principle of detention itself.”**

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**“The demand for life itself has become a revolutionary programme . . . ”**

# ATTACKING PRISONS AT THE POINT OF PRODUCTION: A BRIEF LOOK AT MILITANT ACTIONS AGAINST THE PRISON-INDUSTRIAL COMPLEX

*Companions, let's destroy all the prisons,  
those walls which lock away our desires'  
That money may burn in the fire of passion,  
Let's change everything so that we exchange nothing.*  
--Raoul Vaneigem

It's no big secret that anarchism long ago declared itself to be at war with society's prisons. Not just with the brick and steel bastilles, but with all the instruments - physical, psychological and emotional - that serve to demoralize and imprison peoples bodies and minds. Despite this uncompromising historical stand, however, most practicing (active) anarchists have managed to suppress any ideas they might be entertaining as to how to proceed *now* with this most basic task of our revolution. The classical anarchist writers, from Kropotkin to Berkman, relentlessly exposed the role of prisons in terrorizing the poor and disenfranchised in a class-plagued, authoritarian society. And modern anarchist theorists have cooked up a feast of alternative recipes for dealing with "crime and criminals" - everything from village street patrols to self-managed "therapeutic healing centers" for anti-social offenders.

But in the absence of some concrete and practical notions on how to destroy the walls that are currently in place - notions that are uniquely anarchist - there is little to distinguish these streams from most others in the vast tide of utopian rumblings. After all, any authoritarian Marxist can provide an overview of why prisons in a capitalist society are oppressive. And any liberal social worker is bound to jump at the opportunity of helping "criminals" rehabilitate themselves in more humane surroundings. But prisons - the States main instrument of social control - won't disappear until the entire decadent carcass of authoritarian society is swept away.

So anarchists, if they are to transform the anti-prison movement into part of the larger revolutionary process, need to start hammering away at the prisons *themselves*. Every prison in existence needs to be destroyed, on principle, and in preparation for Day One of the social revolution, when, as they say, the prison gates will fly open and the dragon will fly out. The purpose of this pamphlet is to take a brief, but detailed look at individuals and groups who have targeted the prison-industrial complex at the point of production, in the hopes of giving contemporary anarchists some ideas about how we could potentially be lending a lot more support to our sisters and brothers behind bars.

A thing that every working class fighter or revolutionary has to know is that the 'class justice' has only the name of justice, but is not justice at all, with the dice being loaded from the start. The cards are tricked, and the revolutionary facing the 'class justice' of the capitalist system has not a chance in a million of being found not guilty by the court, or even of receiving a lighter sentence. It's not even necessary to pay for lawyers because they could never defend us as well as we could by ourselves because we have the faith

If we sack the banks, it's because we have recognized money as the central cause of all our unhappiness. If we smash the windows it's not because life is dear, but because commodities prevent us from living at all costs. If we break the machines it is not because of a wish to protect work, but to attack the slavery of salary. If we attack the police bastards it's not to get them out of our neighborhoods, but to get them out of our lives.

The Spectacle wished to make us appear dreadful.

We intend to be much worse.

--Os Cangaceiros, Paris May 1980

Os Cangaceiros was a group of working class anarchists who emerged from the background of the May 1968 revolution in France, a rebellion fired by the alienation inherent in modern conditions and progress and the reduction of human life to a function of a vicious production process. Coming together in Nice, France, Os Cangaceiros - or the "Gravediggers" (of the old world), as they were alternatively known--were characteristic of all the new antagonistic social movements that began their present phase of struggle in the wave of riots and occupations of May 1968 and that demanded nothing less than the *End Of Politics*. Described in the newspapers of the time as "hooligans" and "juvenile delinquents", they had no formal structure but formed a collective of individual desires which found expression together. Their only program being "Never Work, Ever", they set about creating the circumstances which would make this immediately possible. To this end they collectivized their resources and their talents for crime which sat easily with their desire for adventure.

They moved throughout the south of France making friends and initiating actions autonomously, most often against the police, union bureaucracy, politicians and social managers of every sort. They lived nomadically and sought to identify those places where dissatisfaction was reaching a peak and to pass through there to exacerbate it within the limits of their resources. Particularly they highlighted the role played by liberals, social democrats and leftists to manipulate or recuperate those in revolt to their own ends, taking the struggles determination out of the hands of a generalized radicality that had its own dynamic.

"Let's stress once and for all that we, Os Cangaceiros, don't come from leftism: there isn't a single ex-leftist among us. And none of us has ever been mixed up with any kind of political racket in any way. We have only one form of relation with political groups and organizations: war. They're all our enemies, there's no exception."

- Os Cangaceiros, 1985

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In the late 1970's they traveled extensively in Italy where Autonomia was reaching its first peak and the revolutionary movement spun the factories and youth out of the control of the Communist Party and the Unions. There they came across Comotismo who called for "Criminal Struggle Against Capital" and witnessed firsthand the violent assault against the State by the Italian uncontrollables. As their methods of operation led them frequently into illegality and sometimes jail, they understood the significance of this and would turn their attention later more tangibly on the system of crime and punishment.

**"Lets not give free rein to our jailers, strike the tigers heart every day, in every way, according to our differences, against the sadness and solitude of cells of confinement" --Os Cangaceiros**

Throughout the 1980s, Os Cangaceiros followed trouble across the country and continent, spreading subversion and forming networks of support in Paris, Lyon, Belgium, Poland, Brixton and Toxteth. The attraction drawing them to these places varied; in Lyon it was the thrill of joyriding and its twin hobby of ambushing pursuing police cars by a crowd waiting with stones. In Poland it was the wildcat strikes and occupations against the communist government. In Brixton and Toxteth it was the explosion of the inner city youth against boredom and police repression. In each place they would carry out their own actions as a contribution to the struggle without attempting to manipulate the local participants in any way. In their journal at the time, which was not a political paper but a summary of their activities and reflections upon it, they dwelt on such questions as the need for invisibility ( and the consequent rejection of the political milieu which positively invites police attention for its own vanity) and strategies for undermining the old world of capitalism and its novelties and lies. In 1984, Os Cangaceiros went to England to throw their stones with the miners and stayed their for a year in several Yorkshire towns; this was to be the last stand of the traditional working class movement in Britain, the country last to follow the European model. After this, they returned to Paris ( with several miners they had become friends with) and began to squat houses.

While other squatters attempted to use conservationist and architectural arguments to justify the occupation of abandoned, disintegrating buildings, Os Cangaceiros decided to seize the best buildings they could find---they saw squatting as a direct expropriation of the material luxury we are all entitled to, as each of us is tantalized lifelong by the illusion of material wealth and they wished to realize and exhaust the lie. To this end, they moved into a newly constructed apartment block and drove out the yuppie inhabitants who complained. The seized building was then fortified against police attack and they set about creating a no-go zone for the police in their district. When the police finally arrived to evict them, it took them three hours to get through the steel plating on the door, during which time their network of supporters were alerted by phone and counterattacked the police from behind.

In the late 1980s, Os Cangaceiros entered a new trajectory and began to direct their efforts against the Prison -Industrial Complex. In the following three years they carried out multiple acts of sabotage against prison construction sites, stole the architectural plans for new prisons, beat up some of the

architects who were designing the new Gulags and drew attention to the resistance gathering pace inside the walls as well. The scale and effectiveness of their actions against the Prison-Industrial Complex forced Os Cangaceiros to disband their journal and go underground entirely, as they were now being heavily pursued by police. One of their last acts ( before dissolving into the informal criminal networks they had spent nearly two decades creating) was to publish a book on the 16th-century Movement of the Free Spirit, a proto-anarchist current that they strongly identified with.

**At the dawn of Industrialism, factories were modeled after prisons; In its twilight, prisons are now modeled after factories.**

### **- Os Cangaceiros, 1989**

In 1990, a voluminous dossier began to circulate in France. The dossier, sent by Os Cangaceiros, included stolen prison plans and documents and a chronology outlining Os Cangaceiros's campaign of sabotage against the "13,000 project", which pertained to the French States plans to create new maximum security penitentiaries with room for 13,000 prisoners, as well as reproductions of communiques sent to those who were targeted. Interestingly, the police and companies which were attacked tried to remain very discreet about this campaign, apparently wishing to give it as little publicity as possible. The authors of this pamphlet, on the other hand, want people to start thinking about the various ways we can be undermining the Prison-Industrial Complex and for that reason are reprinting a partial chronology of some of the main actions Os Cangaceiros took against the prison industry.

## **Letter to an Architect**

Subject: Ambush

Are your wounds well healed, architect? Did you figure out why?

Shamelessly, with no discretion of any kind, centimetre by centimetre, you have conceived these cages in which even the handicapped will be locked up. Inside the walls which you have designed, individuals who are worth more than you will be beaten up on a regular basis. It is good that you have received an appetizer of what thousands of prisoners will have to endure to the nth degree.

To be sure, architect, this is not your company's first infamy. Considering what you build to house normal citizens, one can guess your competence to shut away delinquents. One moves easily from the tower blocks of the 13th arrondissement [an area of Paris] to prison cells.

Scum, looking at your mug, we were able to note from your tired face how deeply you involve yourself in your projects.

Before you were building walls, now you're going to knock them down.

Os Cangaceiros  
Lyon, 29/03/90



# French Radicals Sabotage Prison Project

*The sabotage operation undertaken against different companies involved in the construction of the new prisons began at the end of April 1989. Whoever accepted to participate in this construction project found them-selves, as a result, exposed to a number of our reprisals. ...*

From the end of April until the end of June, we enter different sites (Aixles-Milles, Tarascon, Villeneuve-les-Maguelonne, Pontoise, Maubeuge, Bapaume), where we sabotage the cement intended for the sites using a procedure which is childishly simple. Sugar mixed with cement, in effect, in a proportion of one to one thousand (in other words, one kilo per ton), prevents the cement from hardening....

On May 1, in Tulle, we turn our attention to the case of BRUGEAUD. This public works company engaged in the construction of the Neuvic-sur-Isle and d'Uzerche prisons is kind enough to furnish us with a portion of the plans (measured in meters) and a sizeable bookkeeping dossier concerning the d'Uzerche site. After this break-in, the premises, files and offices are per-fumed with ammonia.

On May 14, the Saint-Gely-du-Fesc branch of GTM is nicely vandalized....As well, we carry off precious booty from this expedition: detailed information about the participants in this venture, the plans of the Ville-neuve-les-Maguelonne prison, along with technical documents concerning prison security....

On November 25, we take an interest in SCBTP of Pontoise, whose offense is performing a subcontracting job, doing the cleanup of the d'Osny prison for the Spie Batignolles company. Their building for pickup trucks and trucks goes up in smoke.

On January 25, 1990, we inflict irremediable damage on the electronic console of the cement factory in salon de-Provence. The BETON DE FRANCE Company furnishes cement to the sites in the southern region. As well, acid is used to empty two cement mixers.

In a Bordeaux suburb, during the night of February 11 and the morning of the 12th, it is the FORCLUM Company's turn to be set ablaze and seriously damaged. This company, it should be noted, is in charge of furnishing anti-breakout devices for all of the western region, for which it provides prisons with alarms and video cameras and takes care of installing PCIs.

On February 23, in Paris, the architect Christian Demonchy is ambushed on the route he usually takes to get to work. Two of us give him a drubbing while passersby look on. Already responsible, among other projects, for a Club Med in Morocco and, in the framework of the Badinter program, for the Mauzac prison, this faceless individual is working in the office Janet Demonchy on planning prisons in the northern region within the framework of the Chalandon program. Shortly afterwards, by mail, we inform the other people in charge of planning the project of the price they might have to pay for such activity, so that it can no longer be pretended that they are unaware of it.

On February 21, in Vincennes, we sprinkle concentrated tear gas in the offices of the ASTRON Company, causing activity to come to a temporary halt. This company, which carries out research, takes care of everything concerning prison workshops. In mid-April in Laon, as the ORSA cement mixers are going back and forth continuously to deliver cement to the site, it is the electronic console of the ORSA cement factory's turn to be destroyed.

Resignation is death. Revolt is life.

-Libertad.

## French Radicals Sabotage Prison Projects 1989-1993

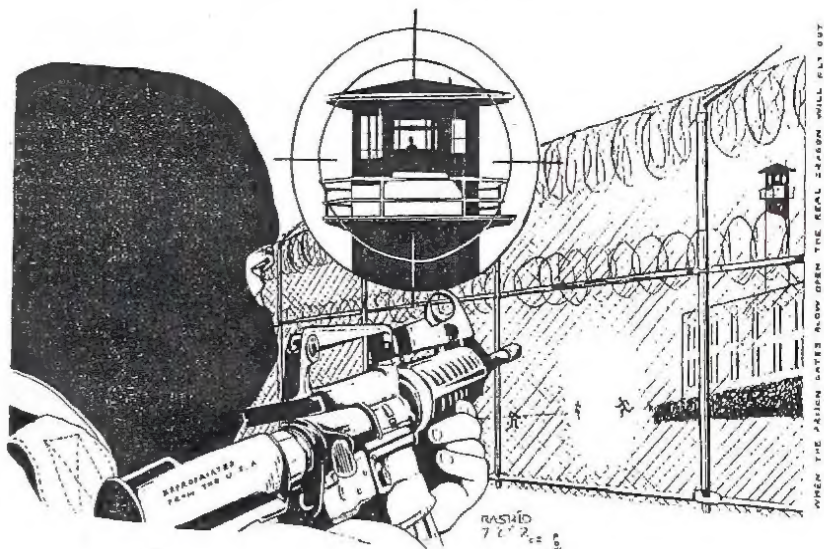
"For the first time in this rotten country, a movement of practical solidarity with prisoners in revolt has appeared outside the prisons. This was a blow which none of the reformers or moaners ever expected--all those who allow the suffering of prisoners to justify their own cowardliness, their own interest in helping to maintain the status quo. Above all, it was a blow for the State. We're not like those who specialize in writing or speaking about prison. The risk of ending up in jail--and the fact that many of us have been there before--largely conditions our lives. Let's point out that those of us who have been convicted and detained in the past have always been criminals; we have no affinity with "political prisoners" whatsoever. We use the action of any proletarian: sabotage and vandalism. We don't carry out symbolic actions, we create disorder like workers in struggle are currently doing, blocking road and railway lines, stopping TV transmitters, etc. The principal characteristic of the actions that we carried out in solidarity with prisoners from mid-May to mid-June was simplicity.

The Brussels TEE was stopped by a very simple procedure which changed a signal TEE light to red. 15 people were enough to stop this important train, spray-paint the demands of the May prison rioters, break the windows to throw the tracts inside. The system of signals of the high speed TGV was sabotaged by a mere hammer; on various rail lines, electrical boxes were burnt with a bit of petrol. Straw burns well in summer, as a Toulouse chair maker who used to make his profits from the sweat of prisoners found out: "bandoleros" reduced his workshop and his business to ruins. At Nantes, the printing press which handles the national press for the western regions was sabotaged when sand, gravel and nails were shoved into the compressors that feed the printing cylinders. In Paris, two metro lines were shut down by the simplest of techniques: throwing worksite material on the tracks."

- Os Cangaceiros

LET MY PEOPLE GO!!!

*The Peoples Army*



WHEN THE PRISON GATES SHOW OPEN THE REAL DANGER WILL BE OUT

## German Prison Bombed - Destroyed Before It Can Destroy!

Many people had good reason to celebrate on the last weekend in March. Early on Saturday March 27 (1993), a series of explosions destroyed most of a newly completed high-tech prison that was to be put to abuse in May 1993. The prison in Weiderstadt, close to Frankfurt, took eight years to build and Cost 250 million Marks (155 million American dollars). It was to hold 500 prisoners and was to be a multi-use prison, including units for deportees, a high-security prison for women, and for prisoners awaiting trial. The German state has made much ado about Weiderstadt's "humane conditions" - a model for a new corrections policy. The latter is true, Weiderstadt would have embodied the latest in high-tech incarceration. In Weiderstadt the prisoners were to be placed in so-called "living groups" of 10 to 20 prisoners, in single cells with a common room and a small kitchen. The cells were to be monitored with video cameras and microphone/speakers.

The "living groups" were to be put together by social workers, psychotherapists, etc, and were to operate by a system of "punishment-reward". The prisoner, on his or her arrival, would be assessed according to his or her will to resist or adapt. Depending on the evaluation by the psychologist, the prisoner would be sent to a "living-group"; which vary from totally conforming to "non-adaptation". Far from being "collective", these "living-groups" would instill competition between the prisoners which would undermine solidarity among the prisoners.

By a "work-therapy" (i.e. forced labor) and other psychological measures, the prisoners would come to see themselves as criminals or as insane. But by adopting the "social values" of the therapists and other prison workers - the values of the prison system, the state and their corporate bosses - they would rise in the hierarchy among the prisoners, i.e. gain privileges and benefits that they could be lost if they did not behave as desired. There can be no system of rewards without a corresponding set of punishment. Total isolation in the high security wing would be the ultimate penalty.

However, there is not much left of the detention center now. The explosions destroyed the administration building, much of the high-tech security system, as well as four "residential" buildings. Damage has been estimated at 100 million Marks (62 million American dollar's) - sixty million Marks for reconstruction, and 40 million for the alarm system that was not on during the night of the attack. Furthermore, it is predicted that corrections planning would be set back four years as a result of the bombing.

The commando Katharina Hammerschmidt of the Red Army Fraction (RAF) released a communique a few days after the action that demanded the release of the remaining RAF prisoners along with other prison-related demands. But the mass media only printed part of the communique and, interestingly enough, the media did not print one of the demands calling for the release of all HIV+ prisoners.

The commando Katharina Hammerschmidt took extreme care to avoid injuries to 11 guards who were captured at about 1:30, bound and gagged and driven to a nearby field where they were left in a van. The buildings were searched before detonation and the commando even put up warning posters on the outside walls of the prison. The commando was named for a close friend of Ulrike Meinhof who was a supporter of the RAF and who spent three years in prison before dying of a breast tumor due to medical neglect in November 1973.

The RAF recently announced a decision to stop targeting representatives of the state

and capital in an attempt to negotiate the release of RAF prisoners. (Though, as the communique makes clear, this is a change in tactics and not a retreat from armed struggle.) Ex-Justice Minister Kinkel had signaled a willingness to release some of the most seriously ill prisoners. Only a few, however, have come out, and others have been hit with new charges and increased sentences. The RAF's response- "They all must be released."

**The following is the RAF communique:**

*Nothing has changed about the step we took in our history, a step which we need and want, but we are involved in a process of developing a social counter-power from below, from which a new proposal for a process of revolutionary change can be developed. This, now as ever, is the highest priority for us, but still, the conditions for this must be struggled for. Last August, we wrote that we could not be held responsible for this.*

*The Weiderstaedter Prison is exemplary of how the State is dealing with open and intensified contradictions: more and more people are faced with prison, prison, prison - and it's a deportation prison, part of the State's racist asylum policies. With its technological perfection of isolating and differentiating imprisoned persons, it is a model for the rest of Europe.*

*Freedom For At Political Prisoners*

*For A Society Without Prisons*

*The Path To Liberation Is Traveled As A Part Of A Process Of Social Learning, Which Is Part Of A New International Struggle For Change!*

*Fight The Racism Of The State And The Nazis!*

*Remove The Racist Consciousness In Society In The Social Struggle Among People -Even For This We Need A Mass-Movement From Below, Which Is Oriented Towards Solidarity, Justice, And The Struggle Against Poverty, Social Isolation, And A Lack Of Perspective!*

*We Greet All Those Struggling For Their Human Dignity In The Prisons In Preungsheim, Santa Fu, Ploetzensee, Rheinbach, Stammheim, Straubing...*

*Solidarity With The International Prisoners Struggle!*

*March 27, 1993 Katharina Hammerschmidt Commando*

**- Red Army Faction**



*It's important that anarchists recognize and take action against the various forms that prisons assume in this society, from mental prisons ( or "asylums") to immigration detention centers. Recently in Australia, there have been repeated actions at immigration centers in Derby and Woomera, including mass escapes and detention center riots involving both prisoners and their allies on the outside. Reprinted below is a short article on the German group K.O.M.I.T.E.E, who from 1995-1997 carried out a series of militant, clandestine actions against deportation centers in Berlin and other parts of Germany. Actions such as these are going to become more important in the years to come as the racist "war on terrorism" intensifies.*

## **K. O.M.I.T. E. E Attack Foiled In Berlin ( 1995)**

On April 10/95, police foiled an attempted attack by four militants against a newly constructed deportation prison in the Grunau section of Berlin. A total of 120kg of explosives had been disguised as fire extinguishers and were designed to destroy the new prison before it could be opened. However, ever since the spectacular RAF commando attack which completely destroyed a new high-tech prison in Weiterstadt in March of 1993, German authorities have greatly increased their surveillance of prison construction sites. Although police foiled the attack, all four persons were able to flee. Since then, however, one woman (Beate) was arrested, but three men (Bernhard, Thomas, and Peter) are still on the run. All three were active in the autonomist scene in the Kreuzberg section of Berlin, according to police. During the foiled attack, police also claim to have found the communique for the action, signed by a group called "Das K. O. M. I, T. E. E. ". This group had previously carried out an attack on all abandoned army barracks in Bad Freienwalde in East Germany in November of 1994. This action, which caused 200,000 DM in damage, was done in solidarity with the Kurdish national liberation struggle and to protest German arms sales to Turkey. Below is the communique from an action against the company responsible for building the deportation prison in Berlin-Gruhlau.

### ***Terrorists Are Those People Who Build Deportation Prisons, Not Those That Blow Them Up! Stop The German State's Racist Asylum And Deportation Policies!***

*On the night of Wednesday/Thursday, June 7/8, 1995, we detonated several containers full of flammable mixtures under three vehicles belonging to the ALLROUND construction firm, because they are involved in the construction of the deportation prison in Grunau and therefore are partly responsible for the deportation of countless refugees and immigrants to regions of war, crisis, and poverty. This company earns money by constructing a place where people will be caged up for weeks, just for exercising their right to demand their fair share of the world's wealth. For refugees, deportation doesn't just mean poverty and sorrow, but also torture, prison, and death. On Monday, 22.5.95, a Kurdish woman named Havva Koc. was deported from Berlin-Schonefeld to Istanbul, where she was immediately arrested by plainclothes police. Her present whereabouts are unknown. As of June 12, the moratorium on the deportation of Kurds will be lifted. In Kurdistan, the Turkish military has been waging war for years, not just against armed ERNK units of the PKK, but also against the Kurdish civilian population and all those who strive for independence. According to the 1994 annual report of the Turkish Human Rights Association (IHD), more than 2,000 villages have been destroyed, writers and*

journalists were sentenced to a total of some 9 years in prison, more than 100 unions, parties, associations, and organizations were banned, and more than 100 publications were confiscated or forced to close down Through its weapons sales to NATO partner Turkey, Germany is a party in this dirty war: first send in weapons to fight against the Kurds, earns lots of money in the process, and then send back all those who flee from this war. The German state is responsible for this cycle of death! "Today, some two years after the right to asylum was practically abolished, politicians celebrating the 50th anniversary of the defeat of fascism speak of peace and reconciliation. But such words are meaningless, as Roma peoples are being deported to Rumania where today they still face persecution, discrimination, and pogroms. They speak of peace, as people still being shipped back to the former Yugoslavia, through their decision to avoid military service, are actively resisting the war, raped women, elderly people, sick and mistreated children. (...) Threatened expansion and tightening of laws regulating asylum seekers, overflowing deportation prisons, the accompaniment of so-called security personnel from the refugee's home country to assist in the deportation process, and the planned "chip card", which would record an asylum seeker's every move -all of this shows that the interior ministers' racist repertoire is still replete. " We demand that all refugees and immigrants be given the right to stay here. Not only because Germany, through its imperialist policies in the Three Continents (the so-called Third World), has created the root causes of flight (poverty, war, etc.), but also because we envision a society where it doesn't matter in the least whether someone is green, black, white, or purple, whether they have a passport from this or that country, whether they speak one language or the other. We don't give a shit about any of these things! Everyone has the right to live here. Period! This prison in Buren, which holds 600 people, is exemplary of the legal, state practice of German racism. Today, no one can claim that they weren't aware of things. The division of labor is clear. Some people pass racist laws, others transport refugees like freight, and still others build deportation prisons- like the ALLROUND firm! The prison in Grunau, when i t ' s finished, will hold 400 people. Unfortunately, the planned attack by K. O. M. I. T. E. E. was foiled by the cops at the last minute. When right becomes wrong, resistance is a must! And when words go unheard, the language of violence must be spoken!

**Solidarity with the Kurdish liberation struggle! We wish Bernhard, Thomas, and Peter lots of fun, strength, and love as they run from the cops! You can live and struggle anywhere! For the immediate release of Beate K.! And of course, for Mumia Abu-Jamal! Greetings of solidarity to Das K. O. M. I. T. E. E. ! Bye for now, until the next time" Das K. O. L. L. E. K. T. I. V. Berlin, June 7/8, 1995**

Our Project: Das K. O. M. I. T. E. E.

Since the end of the 1980s and more so in the 1990s, radical-left lost more and more of its social relevance from year to year, as the praxis and content became increasingly distant from radical positions. As long as there was a common strength, at the militant level as well, we didn't think it was necessary to always appear on the scene under the same name.

As the left began to retreat and the continuity of discussions began to lapse, and as the foundations of common action which had been worked out began to collapse, we decided it was necessary to constitute ourselves as a group in the context of having continuity and openly-stated politics.

We assumed that contributions and interventions by groups whose name has become associated with a certain praxis and political orientation were given greater attention within the left, their statements are read and studied more, more so than groups with no obvious continuity. We hoped over the course of time to have a positive influence within the leftist scene and to help establish certain points of orientation.

### Why Militant Politics?

Considering the status of discussion within the radical left, the silence and refusal to take a stand, we think it's necessary for us to explain why we decided upon militant politics in a period of relatively little movement.

Effective militant praxis is not enough to break through the left's external lack of credibility and internal adaptation and lack of courage. Radical critiques of the present conditions of hierarchy, oppression, and exploitation which do not seek out, utilize, and discover all forms of resistance will sooner or later lose faith in themselves. To stick with our example: A left which, correctly, states that it is a crime to construct and operate deportation prisons, but which does not seek out all possible ways of stopping such construction and operation, loses its perspective and has defeat in its own mind right from the beginning. Our method, if it had been successful, would not have been the only gesture and certainly wouldn't have been the best, but it would have been a lot better than all the complaints about the impossibility of leftist politics in an increasingly right-wing society.

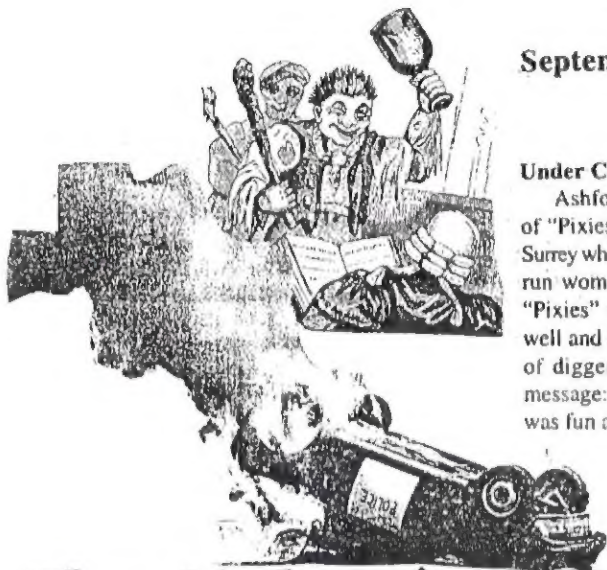
We don't think that the left will develop a comprehensive perspective out of feelings of helplessness and the loss of its methods of struggle, rather it should try to draw strength from trying to close the gap between thoughts and deeds, even in bad times. With our name and our praxis, we wanted to make propaganda for the possibilities of direct intervention and attack, possibilities which are open to everyone who is not satisfied with injustice and oppression.

We aren't saying militant politics is the only way to go in today's society, but we definitely think it was wrong to put all praxis on ice until we could look for the exactly right strategy. We think further development can only take place in the context of a process of reflection and action. Learning by doing. And someday when the conditions are better, when fundamental critiques of the system are in a broader social acceptance, then it will be damn important to be able to look back on a history where we didn't give up the fight, even during times of adaptation to fundamental mainstream positions.

September 12, 2001

### England: New Prison Site Under Construction Trashed By Pixies

Ashford, England: During the night a group of "Pixies" visited a prison construction site in Surrey which has been earmarked for a new, privately run women's prison. With little planning, the "Pixies" descended on the site compound and well and truly trashed two lorries and a number of diggers, leaving behind the spray-painted message: "No Prison State." The Pixies said "It was fun and easy, give it a go."

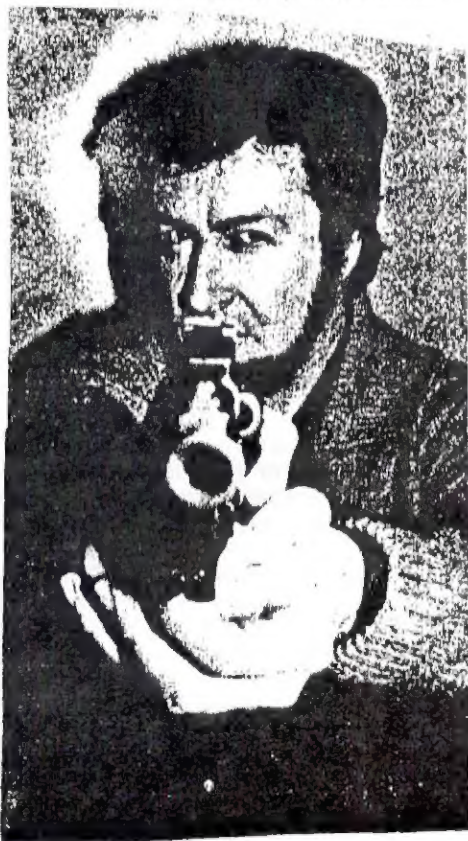


## The Indomitable Gaul!

The daring and audacious publicity-hungry bank robber and kidnapper Jacques Mesrine has to be one of the all-time greatest prison escapees. In the 60s and 70s he became a folk hero in his native France, known as 'the Robin Hood of the Paris streets' for his daredevil raids and for the inability of the entire French police force to catch or hold on to him. He kidnapped and robbed the rich and powerful and even gave away some of the wealth he stole to the homeless.

Mesrine was good looking and charming, with a string of glamorous girlfriends. He was always gentlemanly, courteous and kind, even to those he was robbing or kidnapping. He liked high living, good food and wine, the best restaurants and the best clothes—often robbing banks dressed in the latest fashions. He enjoyed risk and danger but combined this with a passion for meticulous planning and military precision. He was a master of disguise, often wearing two or three wigs on top of one another for swift changes of appearance. Mesrine was constantly protesting over prison conditions and exploiting his notoriety to highlight the issue. And he put this personal hatred of incarceration into practice by escaping from prison in both France and Canada no less than four times, including both the highest security prisons

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On the 17th August 1969, Mesrine and his girlfriend Jeanne Schneider both escaped from Percé prison in Quebec, Canada. They were inside for attempting to kidnap Canadian grocery and textile millionaire Georges Deslauriers after he sacked them both as domestic servants.

Mesrine knew he had to escape from this little local prison before he was transferred to a bigger one. He ripped the handle off an aluminium mug and sharpened it by rubbing it against the cement wall of his cell. Using this as a weapon he captured a prison warder, stealing his keys and locking him in the cell. Jeanne had done the same thing with the warder of the women's wing, and stopping only to raid the kitchens and fill a bag with food, they fled into the woods surrounding the prison.

He was quickly recaptured by the Canadian authorities and sentenced to a total of eleven years in the 'escape-proof' maximum security wing of the Saint Vincent de Paul prison in Laval, outside Montreal. The prison was brand new and supposed to be the most secure prison in the country. But on the 21st August 1972, Mesrine led five others in an escape.

The plan was outrageously simple. While having their morning exercise in the prison yard, they used a pair of pliers stolen from the metal workshop to cut through the three fences surrounding the exercise yard, crawling along the ground between each of the fences. The escapees then stopped two motorists on the nearest highway, commandeering their cars and then later dumping them.

However, feeling that it was unfair that he should be free while others remained incarcerated, Mesrine decided to return to the prison and free the remaining 56 prisoners in the maximum security wing. He immediately started robbing banks to raise the money he would need for the escape plan and a mere two weeks after he had escaped he returned to break out the others.

Along with some friends, he had rented several flats in Montreal under false names, stocking them with enough food for several men to be able to hide there. He had also got enough guns for there to be one weapon between every two escapees. At 2.30 in the afternoon on the 3rd September, Mesrine and his friend Jean-Paul Mercier drove up to the prison armed with sawn-off shotguns. They planned to throw pairs of wire-cutting shears and the guns over two wire fences into the exercise yard. They also had another two get-away cars with drivers parked at intervals up the road.

The escape attempt never worked out. As they drove up to the prison they discovered that since their escape two weeks earlier security had been tightened and there were now cops and armed prison guards everywhere. After a shoot-out with the cops and prison guards Mesrine and Mercier

had to make a swift getaway and abandon their break-out plan.

Back in France in 1973, living on the run, Mesrine was aware that eventually he would be caught, so he arranged his escape from prison in advance. He knew when he was captured he would be tried first at the Palais de Justice in Compiègne, on the outskirts of Paris. So he explored the building and drove around the surrounding area, drawing a map. He arranged an escape plan with his friends, showing them where to park the get-away car and demonstrating the quickest route out of town. He also took them into the Palais de Justice and showed them where guns could be hidden.

On the 8th March 1973 Mesrine was eventually caught by the French police. As he was being driven to prison in an armoured van, he turned to one of the cops escorting him and said: "What do you bet me I'll be out in three months?" The cop smiled; he knew Mesrine was being taken to the highest security jail in France—the La Santé in Paris, from which no one had ever escaped.

On the 6th June, Mesrine was taken for trial at the Palais de Justice in Compiègne. All day he had been complaining of dysentery and demanding to go to the lavatory at regular intervals. While being transferred from one vehicle to another, he saw his accomplice who threw his cigarette to the ground: the agreed signal that everything was ready to go ahead as planned. At the court house he again demanded to go to the toilet. When there was no paper in the toilets for the use of defendants he was allowed to use the lawyers' lavatories. Which of course was where the gun was hidden behind a cistern. Stuffing the gun under his belt, he returned to the trial. As he went up before the bench to answer the charges made against him, he sprang forwards and grabbed the judge, holding him at gunpoint and then using him as a human shield to manoeuvre his way out of the court. He then ran through a hail of gunfire for the get-away car that was waiting and sped off along minor roads by his pre-arranged get-away route. Twenty miles away they stole a new car and dumped the old one, making for a pre-arranged hide-out where Mesrine cracked open a bottle of champagne to celebrate: he had kept his promise and escaped within three months.

On the 28th September the police had him again; an accomplice arrested during a bank robbery had grassed him up to reduce his own sentence. Although his re-capture was a disaster for Mesrine, he typically made the best of a bad job by negotiating with the cops sent to arrest him and using the time this bought to burn all his papers, arrange his arsenal of guns and ammunition neatly on the bed, wash, dress, shave and tidy his flat, so that when he finally flung open the door, immaculately dressed and puffing on a big cigar, he was able to welcome his arch-enemy Commissaire Broussard with a glass of

champagne, offering him his congratulations on having "won this round".

Mesrine knew he was either facing the guillotine or life in prison. He was sent back to La Santé where he tried unsuccessfully to get himself sent to court quickly in order to escape from the courthouse. Instead he ended up awaiting trial in jail for the whole of 1974 and 1975.

From inside La Santé in Paris, Mesrine was secretly communicating with his old accomplice Jean-Paul Mercier, back in the Saint Vincent de Paul prison near Montreal, figuring out plans for him to escape jail, rob banks, get a load of money, come to France and spring Mesrine from jail. Mercier and 4 others escaped again from Saint Vincent de Paul on 22nd October 1974 but Mercier was killed in a shoot-out with the police while robbing a bank in Montreal a mere eight days after the escape.

While awaiting trial in jail, as well as frequently writing to the press protesting over prison conditions and giving an extensive interview to *Paris Match*, Mesrine also wrote a wildly exaggerated autobiography called *L'Instinct de Mort* (*The Killing Instinct*) in which he boasted of large numbers of murders he had never committed. The book was smuggled out of prison and published three months before his case finally came to trial in May 1977. After a typically show-stopping and totally unrepentant performance in court he was eventually sentenced to what under the circumstances must be regarded as a very lenient 20 year stretch.

In the letters he wrote to friends from prison Mesrine talked openly of escaping. So the prison authorities at La Santé, already the highest security prison in France, built a special new maximum security wing to put him in. And then on 3rd May 1978, the governor of the prison received a call on his direct line, tipping him off that Mesrine was going to try and escape in two days' time on the 5th of May. No one took it very seriously. And indeed Mesrine did not escape on the 5th: it was raining on the 5th of May so the escape was postponed until the 8th...

After intensive study of the architecture and functioning of the prison and meticulous planning, Mesrine perfected his escape from La Santé. At 10.00am on the 8th May, Mesrine and two other prisoners escaped by using a secret cache of weapons that had been smuggled into the prison for them by a corrupt prison warden. They held up their guards, stealing their uniforms and locking them in the cells. Then they accosted a group of workmen fixing new bars on the windows of the cells and ordered them to move their ladder to the outside wall of the prison. Using a rope and grappling iron that had also been smuggled in for them, the escapees climbed over the wall and let

themselves down the other side, stopping a passing car to make their getaway. By 10.25am Mesrine and his accomplice François Besse had become the first two men ever to escape from La Santé.

A mere eight days after the escape Mesrine and Besse got back to work, robbing a Paris gunsmiths for weaponry in broad daylight. As usual Mesrine had refused to run away and had simply stayed in Paris. Ten days later the pair robbed a casino.

Mesrine planned a series of revenge kidnappings: first he kidnapped a bank employee who had given evidence against him at his trial and forced him to open the bank vaults for him; then, in a one man campaign against maximum security prisons, he attempted to kidnap the judge who had sentenced him to 20 years, demanding that M. Petit would only be released if all top security wings in French prisons were closed. He said that unless they were closed he would begin to assassinate magistrates. The kidnapping of the judge went wrong but Mesrine managed to escape by running downstairs straight past the cops coming to get him and shouting "Quick! Mesrine's up there!" as he sped past them. As they all raced in the other direction he made good his escape. The one cop who did recognise him he disarmed and handcuffed to a drainpipe. This lonely plot was only discovered later by his colleagues when they had unsurprisingly failed to find Mesrine upstairs.

After another kidnapping of a wealthy banker and industrialist, Mesrine began planning a series of even more high profile kidnappings of major political and media figures. It was while he was engaged in this task that the police he had outsmarted for so long finally caught up with him. This time they weren't going to have him escaping again. On 2nd November 1979, as he was waiting at some traffic lights, his car was ambushed and surrounded by armed police. Mesrine was shot over 20 times in an execution-style killing. He had become an embarrassment to the French government at the highest level—French President Giscard d'Estaing had told the responsible minister only days earlier, "we really have to finish Mesrine off." ★

**Source: Mesrine—The Life and Death of a Supercrook by Carey Schofield (Penguin, 1980)**

**And Now... Jacques Mesrine the video! 90 min colour video in French. For a copy send £7.50 including postage (cheques payable to 'Chronos Publications') to: BM Chronos, London WC1N 3XX, UK.**





The Boston Anarchist Black Cross functions as the defensive arm of local anarchist struggles. We work to forge an organized support network for local activists in need and for folks behind bars. We seek the total abolition of prisons and work on projects in support of this cause.

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