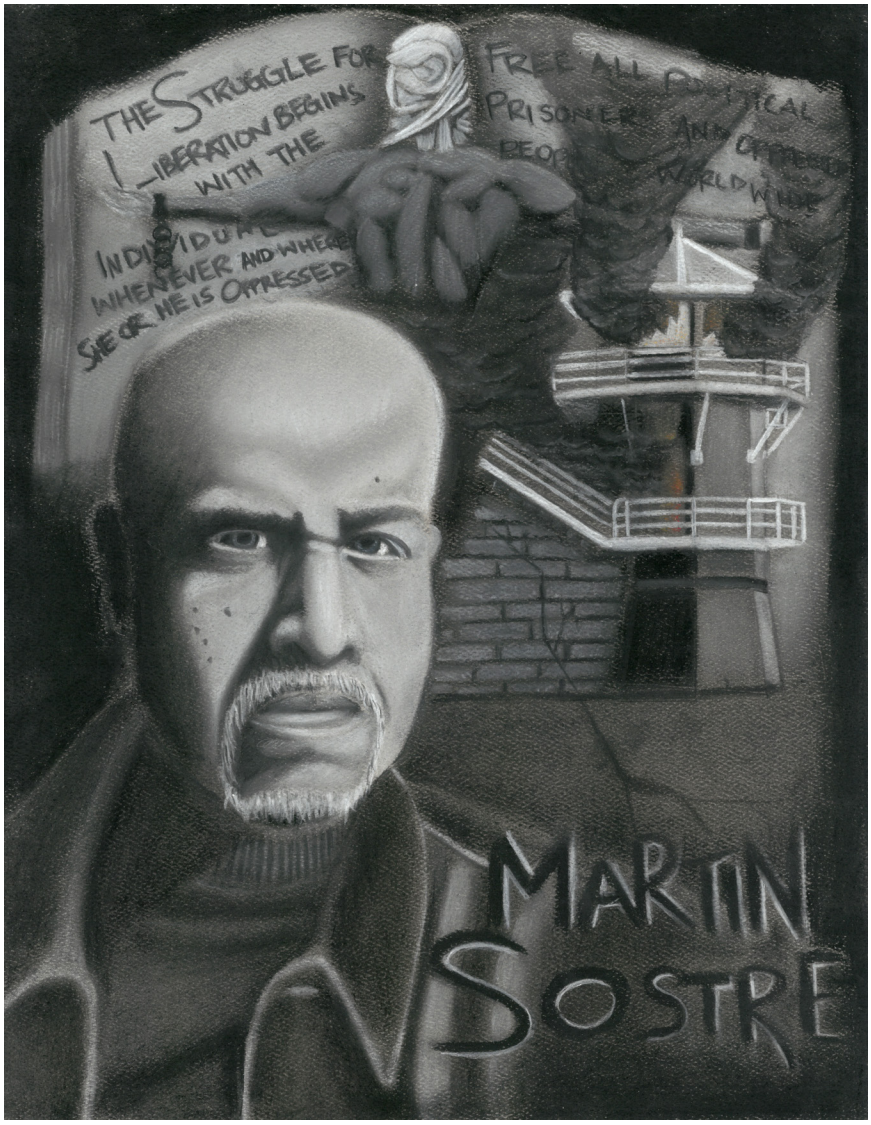
THE NEW PRISONER



MARTIN SOSTRE

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INTRODUCTORY NOTE

The following article was written by a Brother who refers to himself as an "Afro-American revolutionary." Many have come to respect him as a "jailhouse lawyer" nonpareil. Notwithstanding the efforts of Messrs. Gideon and Johnson (*Gideon v. Wainwright*, 372 U.S. 335 (1963); *Johnson v. Avery*, 393 U.S. 483 (1969)), Brother Sostre has undoubtedly had the most far reaching effect on the extension of the limited rights of prison inmates throughout the country.

Like many other "jailhouse lawyers," Brother Sostre has had no formal training in law. Unlike many other "jailhouse lawyers," Brother Sostre is articulate, diligent and *effective*. It is this latter quality that has rendered him anathema to corrections officials who, as he points out, have violated the rights of inmates in spite of, and in total disregard of, the Constitution and specific court orders.

Among the many liberties advocated by Brother Sostre have been: rights to the free exercise of religion (*Sostre v. McGinnis*, 334 F.2d 906 (1964); indigent prisoner's right to appeal in forma pauperis (*Applic. of Sostre*, 189 F. SUPP. 111 (1960); rights of prisoners to due process, right to political expression, right to unfettered access to public officials and a rather limited freedom from cruel and unusual punishment (*Sostre v. Rockefeller*, 312 F. SUPP. 863 (1969), affirmed in part and reversed in part (*Sostre v. McGinnis*, 442 F.2d 178 (1970); right to due process in relation to censorship of literature (*Sostre v. Otis*, 330 F. SUPP. 941 (1971).

He has also been the moving force behind the formation of a prisoners' union in New York State and an advocate of minimum wages for inmate workers.

Brother Sostre is presently serving a 30 to 40 year sentence in Clinton Prison, Dannemora, N.Y. (He has been the recipient of extensive "bus therapy" having been transferred from five prisons in the New York State system to this "maxi-maxi" facility.) His conviction was based on the most spurious of evidence: the testimony of a convicted drug dealer, who subsequently submitted an affidavit indicating that he had perjured himself at the request

of the District Attorney and a conveniently "missing" motion picture film that was allegedly taken through a window that turned out to be boarded up at the time. He is presently seeking a new trial in order to introduce the newly discovered evidence. A full account of Brother Sostre's trial and conviction can be found in *The Crime of Martin Sostre* by Copeland (McGraw-Hill Co., 1970). The latest information and literature on the on-going struggle of Martin Sostre can be obtained from The Martin Sostre Defense Committee, P.O. Box 839, Ellicott Station, Buffalo, New York, 14205.

H.W.

THE NEW PRISONER

Martin Sostre

"Listen, pig, are you really that naive to believe you can fool and pacify us with nightly bribes of ten-cent candy bars and cookie snacks while caging us like animals in your inhuman steel cages; by removing the wire screen from the visiting room but replacing it with the three foot wide table thrust between our mothers, wives, children and loved ones to maintain your inhuman separation; by changing the color of our uniforms from gray to green (and those of our jailers), while exploiting our slave labor for pennies a day; by establishing a phony furlough program which is programmed to exclude from eligibility 1690 prisoners out of 1700;[1] by passing a token equalization bill? After Attica?! Well dream on, pig, until the next rude awakening overtakes you.

"Your widely-publicized prison reform programs—a smoke screen not only to cover up the greatest domestic massacre in a century, but to conceal your current repressive pacification program consisting of the post-Attica multi-million dollar appropriation for guns, gas, chemical sprays, for training killers on their effective use, construction of additional gun towers and assault tunnels within your prison camps from which to shoot us down, building and reinforcing special treatment housing or maxi-maxi units (euphemisms for solitary confinement torture chambers), etc.—will have the same success as your Vietnamization Program in Vietnam upon which they

[1] See Sections 851-854, New York State Correction Law, McKinney's Consolidated Laws.

are patterned. Indeed, as in Vietnam, your repressive prison pacification program, *sub nom* prison reform, has already proven counter-productive in that it has set in motion dynamic revolutionary forces that will effect the overthrow of your racist-capitalist system.

"Are you so spiritually dead and blind that you fail to perceive the cause, effect and consequences of your repressive acts? Are you so hung up on the repressive-genocidal aspect of your racist-oriented technology that, despite your resounding defeat by the heroic Vietnamese people who, bare-footed and bamboo-housed, neutralized your advanced technology with resolute human spirit and revolutionary warfare, you still refuse to believe that your perverse technology cannot prevail over human spirit?

"If Attica fell to us in a matter of hours despite it being your most secure maximum security prison-fortress equipped with your latest repressive technology, so shall fall all your fortresses, inside and out. Revolutionary spirit conquers all obstacles.

"Every one of your prison camps has now become a revolutionary training camp feeding trained revolutionary cadres to each revolutionary foco in the ghetto. The recruits are the thousands of Black militants and revolutionaries framed and kidnapped from the ghettos in your desperate effort to put down the spreading Black Rebellion. While on the surface it appears you've cooled the ghettos, all you've done was remove the dynamic elements, dumped us in your prison camps where our diverse ideologies and experiences cross-fertilized, hardened and embittered us in your dehumanizing cages by abuse, breaking up our families, etc., to then return us to the ghettos as fully-hardened revolutionary cadres. Your oppressive mentality blinds you to these clear facts.

"Do you not see that we've converted your prison camps into revolutionary training camps for cadres of the Black liberation struggle? More important, your prisons have become ideological crucibles and battle grounds. Soon you shall reap the harvest."

The above capsulizes the ideology of thousands of Black revolutionaries being repressed in your prison camps. Although expressed in many ways—rhetorically and organizationally through the many militant and revolutionary prisoners' groups formed in every prison in the U.S.—the basic ideology is the same: using our time in prison to get it together for our return to the ghetto.

While I speak only for prison camps in New York State—and I've been tortured in the major ones: Sing Sing, Clinton, Attica, Green Haven, Wallkill, and Auburn—I have compared notes with many out-of-state

prisoners serving time in New York prison camps and found that the identical ideological situation exists in out-of-state prisons.

We are all political prisoners regardless of the crimes invoked by white racist oppressors to legitimize their kidnapping us from the ghettos and torturing us in their cages. You don't believe it? Well, what crimes did our forebears commit when they were kidnapped from Africa, imprisoned aboard slave ships and brought to America where their labor was exploited for 350 years? Didn't you legalize these crimes against Black people and codify them in your slave codes? Didn't you legitimize your genocidal slaughter of the American Indians and theft of their land by legislating Indian laws and the Homestead Act? Were not these crimes politically motivated and formed the very foundation of United States capitalism? And are you not now the benefactor of this loot and enjoying a standard of living many times higher than your kin in Europe, South Africa and Australia?

Yet, after our forebears were forced to build for you the richest country in the world with their blood and slave labor, the descendents of the white racist kidnappers, murderers and robbers who inherited the bloodstained loot have deluded themselves in the belief that they are the guardians of "law and order," that their victims must recognize them as such, acquiesce in their oppression, and relinquish all claims to their stolen heritage!

The consequences of this self-delusion shall soon bear bitter fruit, as surely as the invasion of Vietnam effected the present ignoble defeat at the hands of the heroic Vietnamese people. The delusion of the oppressor will be submerged by the reality of the struggle waged by the oppressed.

So continue pursuing your Eichmann-like repressive policies which your sadistic racist pig torturers are seeking to enforce. Never will they succeed in breaking our spirit to resist injustices; or convince us that they are the lawful authority-nay, their very outlaw acts remove all doubt (if it ever existed) that they are the outlaws, since they violate not only the laws of humanity but the constitutional and statutory laws they are duty-bound to uphold.

Indeed, they are much more than outlaws, they are mass murderers. No prisoner in the history of New York State— possibly of the United States— has ever borne the stigma of being the mass-murderer of 43 persons. Yet the mass murderers of 43 persons will not be indicted. They continue in office enjoying political largess and passing themselves off as upholders of law and order.

The "people" who put them in office uphold and praise them for their savagery at Attica. They defend the deliberate premeditated murder at Attica, just as Eichmann defended his mass murders at his trial by pleading that

he was an innocent concentration camp administrator caught in the middle and "following orders." But the Israeli Court, following precedents of the Nuremberg Tribunal, rejected this defense on grounds that each individual is a free agent bearing responsibility for his or her individual acts.

The people support and acquiesce in the continuance in office of these mass murderers. They raise no outraged cry against them. They make no demand for their impeachment; no demand that the mass murderers be arrested, charged with murder and indicted. The message therefore is very clear: the white racist people of this oppressive racist society are our enemies who go along with every injustice perpetrated against us by their elected representatives. Their support of bestial, genocidal acts against us reflects ,their consciousness.

The McKay Report whitewashing the Attica Massacre is a case in point.[2] Its statement, in regard to the taking of hostages, that "the holding of human lives for ransom is wrong and only leads to more violence and to a backlash that makes change more difficult," evokes sardonic smiles when read by us, the real hostages whose human lives are being held for exploitative ransom—as were the human lives of our forebears—solely because we are Black. Or does the dictum that holding hostages leads to more violence, apply only when Blacks hold white hostages and not when Black hostages are held by Whites?

But if your dictum has universal validity, does it not then follow that the rising tide of Black rebellion in America by your 25 million Black hostages is the natural legacy of the "wrong'' which you state "only leads to more violence"? Keep on tripping, pig, for reality will trip you up.

Despite your self-delusion that you can pervert reality with lies, the fact is that "when everything has failed" (as it already has, since we cannot get justice from our oppressors)—"when a person is pressed to the wall" (as we already are)—"the taking of hostages may be the only way of reaching the outside world"—as Bill Kunstler correctly observed. The reality is that we politically aware prisoners, whom you cannot deceive into believing the lie that you murderous outlaws are the guardians and dispensers of law and justice, shall continue to employ all means necessary to free ourselves from your genocidal white racist oppression.

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[2] Robert McKay, Dean of The Law School at New York University, was appointed by Governor Rockefeller to prepare a report on the rebellion at Attica. The report was published September, 1972 as the Official Report of the New York State Commission on Attica, Bantam Press (1972).

Hostage-taking is to us as legitimate a means of struggle as was your seizure of agents of the Crown during the American Revolutionary War, and the seizure of British tea during the Boston Tea Party. We, and not our oppressors, are the sole deciders of what means to employ in our liberation struggle.

The Attica Rebellion not only was the direct consequence of your systematic denial of our basic human rights, but of your adamant refusal to accord us the civilized treatment ordered by Federal Courts in *Sostre v. McGinnis, Sostre v. Rockefeller, Sostre v. Otis*, and in many other decisions.[3]

Despite this fact being common knowledge to thousands of lawyers, judges, legislators, administrators and ordinary "people" familiar with the sweeping prison reforms ordered by Federal Courts in the *Sostre v. Rockefeller* and *Sostre v. Otis* decisions, and the millions of words written on the causes of Attica, why hasn't this fact—the obdurate refusal of outlaw State officials to obey Federal Court orders—been exposed? It is due to the white racist conspiracy of silence inherent in oppressive-racist America when the victims of white atrocities are Black.

When the 28 Attica Reform Demands presented to and accepted by Commissioner Russell Oswald on September 12, 1971, are viewed against the background of *Sostre v. Rockefeller, Sostre v. Otis* and other directives, it becomes clear that your refusal to comply with the directives of the Courts and implement the reforms resulted in the Attica Rebellion fifteen months later. The following facts represent irrefutable evidence that, had the provisions of the Federal Court mandates been complied with, and had other legitimate grievances brought to your attention by us prior to September 1971 been redressed, not one person would have died or been injured on September 9-13, 1971.

The first three of the 28 Attica Reform Demands dealt solely with procedures to be adopted after the anticipated agreement between the State officials and rebelling prisoners, and the return of prisoners to their cells. These three demands seek the provision of food, water and shelter (necessities of life which even animals in the zoo receive as a matter of course), an Observers Committee to monitor this operation, complete administrative and legal amnesty for the rebels.

Reform Demand NO. 4 sought "the application of the New York State

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[3] Sostre v. McGinnis, 334 F.2D 906 (2D CIR., 1964); Sostre v. Rockefeller, 312 F. SUPP. 863 (S.D.N.Y., 1969), AFF. in part and REV. in part, Sostre v. McGinnis, 442 F.2D 178 (2D CIR., 1970); Sostre v. Otis, 330 F. SUPP. 941 (S.D.N.Y., 1971).

Minimum Wage Law Standards to all work done by inmates. Every effort will be made to make the records of payment available to inmates." This grievance (and many others) was brought to the attention of your prison officials on at least four occasions. Each time it was rebuffed and repressed-usually with force.

The first time it was presented was in July 1970 when slaves in the Attica Metal Shop presented their demand for a minimum wage. You responded out of your usual "gorilla" bag by throwing into solitary confinement the representatives presenting the grievance. Having no outlet for this legitimate grievance, and having it compounded by your additional injustice of punishing our representatives, we responded with a work strike in the Metal Shop. Warden Mancusi and Commissioner Oswald reacted by confining to solitary confinement all the leaders. In July and August 1970 the strike leaders were transferred to Auburn and other prison camps throughout the state.

Seeking to pacify with crumbs the spreading prisoner discontent with the five to thirty cents per day slave wage of New York State prisons, you then raised prison wages to twenty-five cents for the lowest job category, and up to one dollar per day for the highest. But you immediately raised the already outrageously high commissary prices—e.g., we are forced to pay 40¢ for a two-pound box of sugar while outside you pay 59¢ for a five-pound bag—and cancelled out the few pennies raise in our slave wages.

The second time this grievance was brought to your attention was on November 4, 1970, during the Black Solidarity Day rebellion in Auburn Prison. In fact, it was the same militant leaders of the Attica Metal Shop strike that were transferred to Auburn Prison who led the Solidarity Day rebellion at Auburn.

The third time the unredressed slave labor grievance was presented to you was in July 1971 when the Attica Liberation Faction sent Oswald a list of grievances including the demand for higher wages. As usual, they were rebuffed.

The fourth time this labor grievance was brought to Oswald's attention was in July 1971 when prisoners in Green Haven presented to Warden Zelker and Oswald their list of grievances in the form of 13 Prisoners' Demands, headed by the demand for a Prisoners' Labor Union. The following is a copy of the Prisoners' Demands:

PRISONERS' DEMANDS

ATTENTION:

We the inmates of Green Haven Prison demand . . . .

1. That there be set up an Inmate Labor Union free from the creation of, and the control, by the State or any correctional agency thereof, that administers to the prisoners. But instead however, a private organization whose main concern is the welfare of the prisoners. To be headed by dedicated lawyers, whom we will choose, to act as President, Vice President, Treasurer, and people from organizations in our communities to serve on the Board of Directors of such a Union.
2. We demand that when a person is released on Conditional Release, all institutional holds be resolved. Conditional Release is time earned by inmates, therefore, he should not be held as if on parole. The present guidelines of Conditional Release are illegal and a form of chattel or indenture servitude.
3. We demand that there be a review board set up to bring about the release of those adults who have served ten (10) and more years for a crime that has been long atoned for.
4. We demand a complete revision of the New York State sentencing statutes-everyone sentenced under the old Penal Law (pre-1967) be recalled before court for re-sentencing under the new law.
5. We demand that there be an "Inmate Law Office" where we can set up inmate lawyers to study, prepare and review each inmate's case, who so wishes, and perfect appeals, legal briefs and all forms of writs and petitions in order to present our grievances and other important issues before the courts and other municipal bodies.
6. We demand that all inmates be allowed to correspond with whomever wishes to write him. The correspondant should be left up to the corresponding parties—not the institutional administrators. We further demand that we be allowed to order and receive any periodicals, books, newspapers, magazines or literature that we would normally be able to read if we were free men.
7. We demand that all inmates have religious and political freedom … that any religious and political books published in the U.S.A. be allowed to enter the prisons, so that prisoners can learn and get about to up-lift their wretched souls.
8. We demand a well balanced, wholesome and nutritious diet. That the F.D.A. inspect all penal institutions to enforce cleanliness and diets.
9. We demand proper medical attention both by the prison hospital and dental department. We demand that the dental department use and administer novacain for all filling of teeth.

10. We demand an immediate end to cruel and inhuman treatment and brutality by prison officials.
11. We demand that we be able to obtain personal typewriters, to be kept in our cells, in order to help us prepare ourselves for society and in order to prepare legal material for the courts in our legal efforts.
12. We demand that Deputy Superintendent H. Sawner and his Gestapo agents be removed from their positions and jobs because of the use of cruel and inhuman treatment issued out to prisoners.
13. Last, we demand to be treated like MEN . . . ."

On August 18, 1971, Earl Smoake, one of the militant representatives of Green Haven, wrote to Zelker and Oswald asking to discuss with them the Prisoners' Labor Union and the other twelve grievances set forth above. He received no reply.

However, when on August 23, 1971, Earl Smoake discussed the organization of the Labor Union in a meeting with his fellow prisoners in the prison yard, he was thrown into solitary confinement.

Thus Oswald was presented with the labor grievance on at least four occasions prior to the Attica Rebellion. He ignored them and used force to repress our legitimate desire to receive some of the fruits of our labor and end the inhuman and unconstitutional treatment of prisoners in the prison-fortress of New York State.

Reform demand NO. 6 of the Attica rebels demanded that the State "allow all New York State prisoners to be politically active without intimidation or reprisal." Why should it have been necessary to demand the right to exercise constitutionally protected political rights without intimidation or reprisal when the Federal Court thirteen months earlier in *Sostre v. Rockefeller*, had already enjoined the Commissioner of Correction and Warden Mancusi of Attica "from punishing Sostre for having in his possession political literature and for setting forth his political views or in writing?"[4] The answer is clear: your outlaw prison officials disregarded the Court's mandate and continued to punish us for exercising our political beliefs.

The same applies to Reform Demand NO. 7 which seeks the allowance of "true religious freedom." Were not prison officials ordered by the Federal Courts in *Sostre v. McGinnis*,[5] to permit the exercise of the First Amendment

[4] 12 F. SUPP. 863, at 885; AFF. 442 F.2D 178.

[5] 334 F.2D 906 (2D CIR., 1964).

right to worship? Why then should prisoners still have to demand the exercise of this "preferred-right" seven years later? Is it not obvious that your State prison officials are nothing but outlaws and criminals who use the U.S. Constitution and Court orders for toilet paper? Is it not obvious also that your State and Federal Courts, members of the same oppressive political structure to which your prison officials belong, are co-conspirators in the conspiracy against prisoners to deny us our Constitutional and human rights?

The pleadings of the case prove that *Sostre v. McGinnis* was the result of a six-year spiritual, physical and legal struggle led by three determined prisoners. The struggle commenced in Clinton Prison during 1958 when we first sued in Plattsburgh Supreme Court via writ of *mandamus* seeking the exercise of religious freedom.[6]

The spiritual and physical aspect of the struggle involved years of torture in solitary confinement, beatings, tear gassings while locked in cages, bread and water diets, and many other barbarities inflicted by the State to break our spirit, health and resoluteness, and coerce other prisoners from joining our ranks. But far from breaking our spirit in the solitary confinement dungeons of Clinton and Attica Prisons, these dungeons became the "foco" of rebellion which spread to every prison in the State and involved hundreds of prisoners. The story of the spread of the struggle, how the problem became so serious that the State Attorney General was forced to set up a special bureau to handle the scores of Muslim complaints flooding the courts, and how the Muslim struggle evolved into the revolutionary struggle which led to the Attica Rebellion, is detailed in my forthcoming book.

It took six years of suffering and litigation to get the *Sostre v. McGinnis* ruling in 1964. I personally spent five years in solitary confinement struggling, and had my sentence not expired in September 1964, while in Attica solitary confinement, I probably would have spent many more years under torture. The 1964 ruling of the 2D Circuit Court (*Sostre v. McGinnis*)[7] remanded the case to State Court where it was stalled through *Bryant v. Wilkins*,[8] *SaMarion v. McGinnis*,[9] to demand NO. 7 of the Attica Rebellion to "allow true religious freedom"-seven more years! Thus the struggle to exercise a First Amendment "preferred" right took from 1958 till 1971, thirteen years of torture, suffering and death at the hands of racist outlaw savages who recognize no law except that of force, violence and murder.

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[6] See Pierce, Sostre, SaMarion v. LaVallee, 293 F.2D 233 (2D CIR., 1961).
[7] 334 F.2D 906 (2D CIR., 1964).
[8] 258 N.Y.S.2D 455 (1965).
[9] 284 N.Y.S.2D 504 (1967).

Demands T. 8, 9, 17 and 25 of the Attica rebels seeking the end of arbitrary censorship of literature and correspondence, the employment of Black and Spanish-speaking officers, and the end of unlimited punishment in solitary confinement were already ordered by the U.S. District Court (Constance Baker Motley, J.) sixteen months earlier in *Sostre v. Rockefeller*.[10]

The depraved savagery of your outlaw prison officials and your judicial co-conspirators is reflected in the rest of the reform demands. The very fact we have to demand "rehabilitation" from those whose primary function is the rehabilitation of prisoners, and food and medical treatment—basic necessities of life recognized by all civilized beings—makes manifest the type of individuals into whose care the "People of the State of New York" have thrown us.

Our claim that your prison officials are the real outalws and we prisoners the victims, is supported by the holding of the U.S. District Court in *Sostre v. Rockefeller*, *supra*, where the Court stated at page 863 that:

> It is not the function of our prison system to make prisoners conform in their political thought and belief to ideas acceptable to their jailers. On the other hand, one function is to try to rehabilitate the lawbreaker by convincing him of the validity of our legal system. There is little chance that such an objective will be achieved if prisoners are entrusted to those who likewise break the law by denying prisoners their basic constitutional rights. This Court holds that Sostre's confinement to punitive segregation for the letters he wrote and for refusal to answer questions about a political organization, and his subsequent punishment for mere possession of political literature, were unreasonable punishments and violated his First Amendment right to freedom of political expression.

The Attica Rebellion was the result of recognition, after decades of painful exhaustion of all peaceful means of obtaining redress, of the impossibility of obtaining justice within the "legal" framework of an oppressive racist society which was founded on the most heinous injustices: murder, robbery, slavery. The ghetto rebellions were the result of a reaching of the same conclusion by the oppressed masses after centuries of civil rights struggle and court litigations, such as the 1954 Brown school integration decision, which after a twenty-year struggle for implementation was nullified by anti-busing legislation. The rising tide of revolutionary guerrilla struggle throughout the world is likewise due to the failure of all other means to redress injustices

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[10] 312 F. SUPP. 863 (S.D.N.Y., 1969).

heaped on the oppressed.

Attica defrocked the vicious outlaw murderers who were passing themselves off as lawful authorities. It is now a historical fact that the upholders of "law and order" are the mass murderers of 43 persons in the Attica Massacre. These are the murderers and torturers who are in charge of New York State and its prison camps.

The reality of what must be done has been made manifest through the process of elimination of "legal" remedies. No longer shall we waste time and suffer prolonged needless punishment and injustices litigating civil rights cases in your oppressive courts as we did in the 1950's and 60's. Gone forever is our naivete of the 1960's which deceived us into regarding as militant the "we want" programs we followed, which in reality were the product of 400 years of slave mentality, in which the foolish slaves begged their master to grant them freedom, justice, equality, fertile land, etc. We've been saying "we want" this and "we want" that for 400 years, but the truth of the matter is that those who have been robbed of their freedom and heritage obtain justice only by using all means necessary in the struggle against their oppressor.

Little did you imagine that the very dungeons used to torture us, where you forced us to sleep naked on the cold concrete floor with windows opened to give us pneumonia, on bread and water diet, and with a five-gallon paint bucket for a toilet, would become the crucibles from which evolved the new hardened prisoner and the Vanguard revolutionary ideology which has now spread throughout New York State prison and into the ghettos.

The Vanguard revolutionary ideology formulated by the survivors of your torture dungeons is reflected in the following program:

PROGRAM OF BLACK VANGUARD FOR LIBERATION WHY WE FIGHT, OUR AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

1. Since our heritage of 350 years of Black slave labor was stolen and invested in the development of this continent of North America by our oppressors, our aim is to recover this stolen heritage by liberating, through revolutionary armed struggle and all means necessary, a portion of this developed land from our oppressor's control. We shall establish our Black independent nation on this liberated territory which is ours by right of our labor invested in its development, our blood shed in its behalf, and by right of birth and history.

2. Our armed struggle for liberation, like that in Africa, Asia and South America, is a just struggle. We seek not to steal someone else's land and property, but to recover our stolen heritage: the product of 350 years of Black slave labor stolen from our ancestors and employed by our oppressors to make the U.S. the richest country in the world.
3. We fight for the liberation of Black people held captive in ghetto colonies inside the United States by the white racist oppressor. By liberation we mean complete freedom from the physical, political, social and economic control of the white racist U.S. government, and the establishment of our own independent Black nation.
4. Since our struggle for liberation in America is a part of the world revolutionary struggle for liberation against the common U.S. enemy and its allies, we will use the same means employed by all oppressed peoples to liberate ourselves: guerrilla warfare, first and foremost.
5. As a first step towards nationhood, we must obtain revolutionary bases from which to operate. We must seize areas in urban and rural Black communities from the control of the oppressor. From these liberated and expanding areas we will wage our war of liberation.
6. Our independent Black nation will be a Socialist nation based on the principle that people, and not property, are the most precious of all possessions. Having freed ourselves from 400 years of genocidal white racist capitalism, we are not about to imitate our white oppressors by establishing a Black capitalist nation.

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Does the Vanguard program differ from the "we want" programs like day does from night? Don't you wish we had remained mentally dead and in the "we want" trick bag while believing all the while we had the "key" to the problem of our oppression? It's too late now, for once mental chains are broken there is no return to the status quo ante.

We, the new politically aware prisoner, will soon galvanize the revolutionary struggle in America to its new phase that will hasten the overthrow of your exploitative racist society, recover the product of our stolen slave labor which you now enjoy, and obtain revolutionary justice for all oppressed people.

— MARTIN SOSTRE,
Auburn Prison-Fortress
(in keep-lock for refusing to shave beard)

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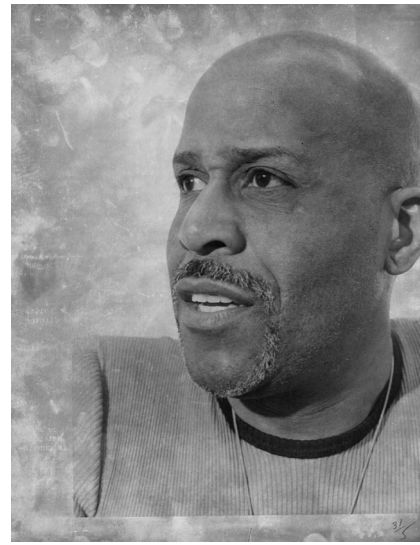

Martin Sostre (1923-2015) was a revolutionary anarchist and anti-imperialist political prisoner and jailhouse lawyer. He advocated for prisoners' rights to religious freedom, political expression, and due process regarding prison censorship and solitary confinement. He was also a teacher and mentor, as owner of the radical Pan-Africanist Afro Asian Book Shop in Buffalo, New York and a community organizer with the Juvenile Education and Awareness Project in Passaic, New Jersey.