Garrett: How did you two get in contact?

Lorenzo: Lawrence and I met because I had been looking for years for a sincere revolutionary prisoner who I could influence. I was really unsuccessful for years. I could tell that he didn’t himself understand how it was railroaded into prison and how the system was doing to him what it was doing to a number of young Black people. I was trying to educate him with what I knew in terms of revolutionary politics, in terms of building a new kind of revolutionary prisoner movement that’s based in the communities, instead of these allied separate organizations that claim to support prisoners, and also to give him whatever tools I had learned in terms of the streets activism. In order to discuss this conversation, Lawrence and his comrades are currently fighting for his freedom. Researchers can view Lawrence’s art, writing, and learn more about him and the Free Lawrence Movement by visiting the following website: www.freelawrencemovement.com

Garrett: You brought up Martin Sostre, who connects all three of us. Lorenzo, when you talked about finding one person to impart this knowledge upon who can then form a link in the chain, I was thinking about how Martin did that with you; at the time you met Martin you were half his age. How do you view the continued relationship you have with him, and Martin’s relationship with you during fall of 1969?

Lorenzo: First of all, Martin Sostre stands as a really important historical figure at that moment. The prisoners were just building up in terms of population and their political rights. They also knew, having looked at the years of reporting on the civil rights movement and the Black power movement, they knew that there was a movement in the streets that was representing a real threat to the way the system was being run back in the day. He had been trying to reach prisoners on the inside with political education. His ability to file writs of habeas corpus and other legal actions against prison officials, as well as civil rights lawsuits, forced changes inside the New York state prison system. When I met him, he was telling me and young people that he was winning the lawsuits to change the conditions of people in prison. The prisoners were trying to organize other people to file similar cases all over the country in order to have a national application for what he was doing legally.

Sostre wanted the prison movement to become an important campaign in and of itself. There was always the tension of the other movements of the day. He succeeded at that—a living example of someone who was challenging the system in that setting but not as some type of savior, but rather inviting others to work with him in whatever capacity they could. It was really important to me and changed my life, and it changed the lives of others.

Garrett: You mentioned earlier a lot of things have changed in the last 60 years, but some remained the same. Can you elaborate on some of the changes you’ve noticed while talking to Lorenzo?

Lorenzo: We are dealing with a different stage of human civilization. We have reached out to an organization of people who are in the system. We are talking about mass imprisonment now—the largest prison population in the world, the longest imprisonment terms and long-term solitary confinement. There has been a wholesale destruction of, and of course organize, a mass movement against the prison, and all these abolitionists and so forth have come together in some form of political activity, or rather inviting others to work with him in whatever capacity they could. It was really important to me and changed my life, and it changed the lives of others.

Garrett: Martin Sostre by Lawrence Jenkins. Art provided by Lawrence Jenkins. “The struggle begins with the individual, independent, wherever one may be in the world. Free all political prisoners and oppressed people worldwide.”

By Lawrence Jenkins & Lorenzo Kom’boa Ervin with Garrett Felber

Editors’ Note: This issue’s fishing line brings current political prisoner, Lawrence Jenkins, and former political prisoner, Lorenzo Kom’boa Ervin, together to discuss political education inside and their organizing work while imprisoned. A special thanks to Garrett Felber for facilitating this conversation. Lawrence and his comrades are currently fighting for his freedom. Researchers can view Lawrence’s art, writings, and learn more about him and the Free Lawrence Movement by visiting the following website: www.freelawrencemovement.com

Martin Sostre by Lawrence Jenkins. Art provided by Lawrence Jenkins. “The struggle begins with the individual, independent, wherever one may be in the world. Free all political prisoners and oppressed people worldwide.”

INSIDE-OUTSIDE FISHING LINE: Speaking Truth to The People: Building a Mass Movement against the Prison Industrial Complex With Current and Former Political Prisoners

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we have to treat this situation as such, and not leave it to be something that we simply theorize around, or talk about, or imagine. We got to really treat this situation as a real attack and to exist it as such. When we are doing our political education and the movement and the community, they need to understand with sincerity commitment what a struggle like this entails and how hopeful it can be. We can’t afford to be passive about that. It does call for more radical organizing, more sacrifice, more sincere commitment, and more active solidarity. That’s something that I hope we can more successfully fulfill with in our political education in building a mass movement along those lines.

In my experience with the PIC and state violence, I have no other option than to see this for what it really: domesic warfare being carried out on me and my community and those of us locked up inside.

Garrett: What message would you want to share with the prisoners both inside and out about what you both have learned through each other and this relationship?

Loreno: I think we need to understand one thing: we don’t need a hero. What we really need to do is to have a movement that empowers prisoners to commit so-called “crimes.” If we get that right, and we can get that right, that thing is that we don’t need a hero. What we really need to do is to have a movement that empowers prisoners to commit so-called “crimes.” What we really need to do is to have a movement that empowers prisoners to commit so-called “crimes.”

Virginia is a state that abolished parole in 1995 and has an 85 percent sentence-to-serve rate. No drug rehab centers and only two state hospital facilities. The problem is that the new institutions that house everyone together, always treating everyone equally: Harshly, inhumane, and oppressive. Our system is a prison system.

But, lo and behold, we are finally changing all of this. Years of hard work by us human rights activists and advocates, our friends, families, and communities that have powered countless hours and funds into bringing about meaningful change in a state that used to be last in nation-wide legislation and new-era beliefs and freedoms. We are continuing to partner with other activists and build coalitions to bring about change and directional focus in abolishing the prison industrial complex. We are流氓ing about each other through word of mouth and social media platforms that focus on like-minded views. It’s been a long time in the making, but we are finally formulating coalitions that are advocating for change immensely.