

Jail house rock

JAIL HOUSE ROCK

More than 150 persons demonstrated outside the Detroit-Wayne, City-County Building protesting the wretched and inhumane conditions which exist inside the Wayne County Jail earlier this month. The demonstration had been sponsored by the Labor Defense Coalition, which is a programmatic offshoot of the International Black Appeal. The demonstrators, both black and white, picketed for approximately two hours, chanting slogans such as, "Close the jail!" "Free Angela," and "Hail James Johnson." James Johnson, as reported in the July 1970 issue of the INNER-CITY VOICE, is presently awaiting trial for the murder of two foremen and a job-setter at Chrysler's Eldon Gear and Axle plant in Detroit. Since the time of his incarceration, Brother James Johnson has begun to wage an implacable struggle against conditions inside the County Jail which have been so stridently articulated as being such that, "animals caged in the Detroit Zoo are allowed to live in a less ominous manner." Johnson, along with five other inmates, had recently filed suit against the jail administration. In a press statement released from jail, the inmates address themselves to the underlying problems which speak to their condition. The statement expressed the following:

As inmates of the Wayne County Jail we live sixty minutes of every hour, 24 hours a day, in hell. We recognize that imprisonment takes many forms, be it in the factories, ghettos or on the battlefields in Indochina. We know where we come from--both in class and color. More than 90% of us are too poor to even hire a lawyer, 85% of us are black. Even though we're "presumed innocent" while we're awaiting trial, we are forced to live in conditions that society wouldn't allow to exist at the Detroit Zoo.

This statement is issued from our jail cells. Cells that are really 6 by 8 foot cages that hold 3 people. Cages that also hold overflowing toilets, rotten food, foul health conditions, human filth, rats and roaches. Cages that don't have any recreational or educational facilities at all.

We are engaged in peaceful struggle in the language of the law--the same law that puts us in this hell-hole because we couldn't pay the ransom of a bail bond system that decides our freedom or imprisonment only on how much money we have.

We seek, in the only rational way possible, the support of all decent human beings in this City. Without the mass support of the people who we are trying to reach through this press statement, we

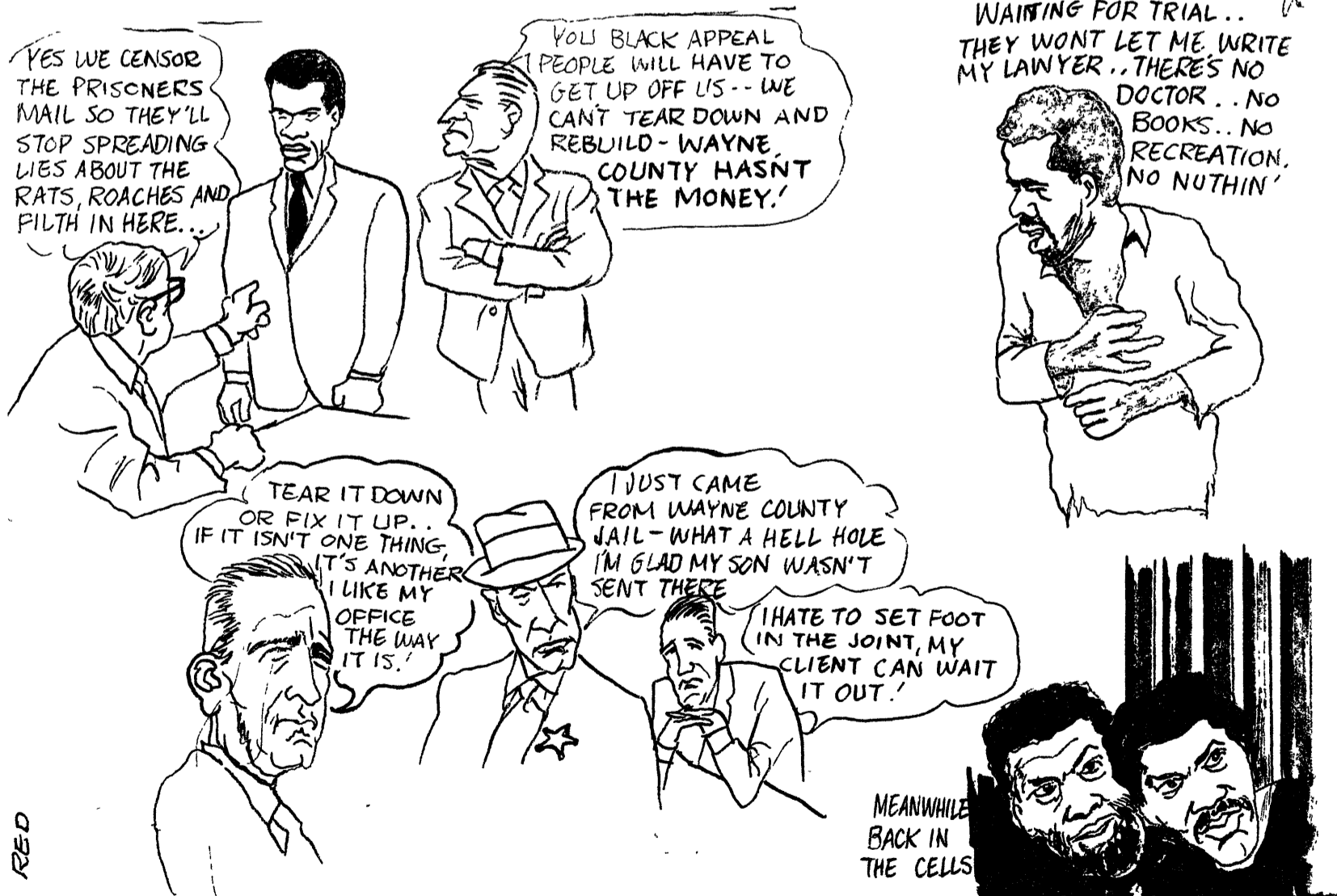
shall remain not just prisoners of the jail but also prisoners of a vicious system that creates and perpetuates the many institutions that enslave and oppress people. Sheriff Lucas suggested in a January 13, 1971, Free Press statement that the only way for us to conquer this problem is to burn the jail down. That's tough to do, we're locked inside.

Included in the suit, which is demanding abolishment of the sordid conditions which lend to the immeasurable harm done to persons who are unfortunate enough to find themselves imprisoned, is Wayne County Sheriff William Lucas. In a court hearing held following the demonstration, Sheriff Lucas, along with Dr. Richard Bruzumna, a psychiatrist, who had toured the jail, were called to the witness stand. Lucas, being charged with the administrative task of both the detention and arresting bureaus of Wayne County, had ordered very tight security in and around the courtroom. At least 12 county deputies were stationed on the floor. The press, along with the many spectators, were thoroughly searched. Once inside the courtroom they were informed that they would not be allowed to leave except for periodic court recessions. No doubt these highly unusual precautions had been precipitated by the incident at the San Rafael courthouse. During the examination, Dr. Bruzumna testified that many of the inmates suffer from what he

described as "institutionalism." This he stated was primarily due "to the stress of being caged, lack of contact with family and friends, no recreation, lack of privacy, and lack of sanitation. This social isolation syndrome is reflected in prisoners by "intense feelings of depression, and being extremely withdrawn."

Sheriff Lucas stated in his testimony that he had long been clamoring for a new jail. He described his administrative role as being very difficult because of the many problems deriving from the "insufficient facilities" presently housing Wayne County inmates. He depicted the conditions inside the jail as "very harsh and difficult." He verified an incident described earlier in the examination where an inmate caged on the 7th floor made a suicide attempt. Due to the "inadequate" medical staff at the jail, a non-professional was charged with the responsibility of making a diagnosis. The patient was put on medication, which later proved to be insufficient. The inmate was later able to complete his suicide because of the medical staff member's incorrect diagnosis. Sheriff Lucas explicitly stated that "institutions of detention should be at least as humane as facilities geared to house inmates who have been found guilty." This, he said, has never been the case in the Wayne County Jail.

drum beats



RED