

Vancouver 5 Begin Long Prison Term

Fifth Estate Collective

1984

The trials of the Vancouver Five are over and their long exiles in prison have begun (see FE #317, Summer 1984). The five pled guilty earlier this year to a series of guerrilla actions and bombings.

For those who missed the results of the sentencing, Ann Hansen was given a life term in prison; Brent Taylor sentenced 22 years; Julie Belmas received a 20 year sentence; Gerry Hannah, 10 years and Doug Stewart, six.

Not content with the existing vicious sentences, the province of Ontario announced in October that they plan to press charges against Brent Taylor for the 1982 bombing of the Litton cruise missile facility in Toronto. [See "Long Sentences for Direct Action Group," FE #317, Summer, 1984.] Hansen and Belmas have already pleaded guilty to the explosion and it is felt that even if Taylor is convicted, his already lengthy sentence' would not be extended.

It was assumed that Litton and the provincial government were content to let the matter rest since the severity of the Vancouver sentences would have been sufficient deterrence against similar activities if that is the state's main interest.

The transfer of the Five into the Canadian federal prison system was not without its outrages. Doug Stewart was transferred to Archimbault Penitentiary outside of Montreal. This is sheer vindictiveness. Both the population and administration of Archimbault are French-speaking. Given the traditional hostility between English and French speaking prisoners, it is not an easy place for a first time prisoner to learn the ropes about survival in what is one of Canada's most brutal prisons.

The transfer, 3,000 miles from home, is particularly outrageous since Stewart is doing a relatively short term. Stewart has already witnessed an incident in which a prisoner had his shoulder blown off by a shotgun blast fired by a guard attempting to break up a fight between two other prisoners some distance away.

Hansen and Belmas were both taken in to the warden's office upon their separate arrivals at the prison for women (P4W), in Kingston, Ontario, and told that they should not expect to receive any visitors. Hansen was further warned not to go around looking for "disciples."

Visitors to Canadian prisoners must be cleared by the security department and virtually anything from a criminal record to simply not being considered a "rehabilitative influence" can be used as a reason for refusal. Up to this point, Ann and Julie have had no one cleared for visiting and most of the applications are still being processed. It is speculated that their presence in P4W is one reason that a glass partitioned visiting room is being constructed at the prison for the first time.

Taylor ended up at Milhaven in Ontario and has no particular grievances yet except that he and Ann have not received permission to write to one another as a common-law couple. He is lamenting the fact that the volume of mail he received at Oakalla prison in British Columbia has almost completely stopped. If the Five were on your mailing list, or even if they weren't, please note their new addresses at the bottom of this article.

Canadian prison regulations apparently limit the number of packages a prisoner can receive to four a year. It is not certain at this time how strictly this will be adhered to; it might well depend on the prison. Parcels of books probably would be considered within this limit and hence shouldn't be sent until the situation is clarified, though

Brent is willing to take a chance. Magazines, leaflets and letters are okay although magazines might be turned back; again, the censorship policy seems to be applied arbitrarily.

Gerry Hannah was sent to the medium security institution at Matsqui, about 40 miles from Vancouver. He seems to be doing well considering the circumstances and is taking a horticulture course.

Money is still urgently needed to finance Brent Taylor's defense on the Litton bombing charges, and also for the many upcoming appeals and eventual parole hearings. Contributions and/or to receive mailings on developments in the defense of the Five, write:

Free the Vancouver 5 Defense Group

P.O. Box 48296, Bentall Station

Vancouver BC V7X 1A1

CANADA

Current addresses for the imprisoned political victims are:

Ann Hansen, Julie Belmas

Box 515

Kingston, Ont. K7L 4P7 CANADA

Brent Taylor

Box 280

Bath, Ont. KOH 1G0 CANADA

Doug Stewart

Box 1210

St. Anne des Plaines PQ J0N 1H0 CANADA

Gerry Hannah

Box 4000

Abbotsford BC CANADA

Sidebar: Doug Stewart's Hunger Strike Wins

Doug Stewart ended a 26-day hunger strike on October 31 when he was given notice that he would be transferred to a prison in British Columbia close to his family and friends.

Doug began the strike Oct. 6 and his physical condition had deteriorated into a "dangerous state" toward the end of his fast. On the 24th day eight supporters of Doug occupied the Montreal office of the Solicitor-General, the cabinet minister in charge of the prison system, when it began to appear that the Correctional Service of Canada was not going to allow the transfer.

The eight were arrested on "mischief" charges and further demonstrations were held in Montreal and Toronto. The one in Montreal turned into a celebration as word came from Ottawa that the transfer had been approved.



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