

Statement from the Hole

There's an "A" under the circle, but if it showed, it would be banned from many prisons!

anon.

2003

FE Note: The Fifth Estate has a long history of granting free subscriptions to prisoners of the state—inmates and GIs, but often their masters object to our content. No wonder since our ideas challenge the concept of rulers and ruled that the dominant institutions are built on.

Recently, we have had numerous penitentiaries reject our paper, denying our prison subscribers access to ideas. Typical is the rejection notice we received from several inmates in the Oregon "Corrections" system charging our paper "Contains material that threatens or is detrimental to the security, safety, health, good order, or discipline of the facility." They specifically point out "Front Cover—Anarchist Symbols" as the offending item. To the morons doing the censoring, this symbol of human freedom is a "gang emblem."

Below is a letter from our comrade Rob Los Ricos who has run afoul of the arbitrariness of this system.

Statement from the "Hole"

On January 9, I, Rob Thaxton (Rob Los Ricos) and fellow anarchist Brian McCarvill were sentenced to 120 days in the Disciplinary Segregation Unit at Oregon State Penitentiary (OSP). The offense listed on our Misconduct Reports is "Unauthorized Organization I," but the hearings officer told me that she found me "guilty of continuing to be involved with the anarchist movement."

The Oregon Department of Corrections, and OSP in particular, have taken it upon themselves to act as thought police and punish people for their political views. The act which inspired our punishment is so petty as to be laughable: we had asked people to send us mail! When friends and comrades responded by the dozens, the prisoncrats took offense and sent us to the hole.

One day, I'll look back at this time and laugh. Right now, though, this isn't very funny, sitting here without my guitar, books, magazines, income from my job in the prison infirmary, almost no chance for visits, listening to idiotic conversations between people emblazoned with swastikas shouting from one cell to another. This whole episode revolves around symbols and their power, though apparently the OSP staff worry less about swastikas than they do about circle-A's, the anarchy symbol.

Vague Boundaries

It's the little things. Since I was first incarcerated here, the prison authorities have routinely denied materials they think cross some vague boundary of acceptability. A book examining anarchist tendencies in "primitive" societies by UK literature professor, the late John Moore, was forbidden. Canadian art professor Allan Antliff's book on anarchist influence in modern art was allowed.

It was evident to me from the beginning that this was a bit arbitrary, and I tried to challenge their designation of anarchists as a Security Threat Group (STG), and the circle-A as an STG symbol. I can receive anything, even if it has the word "Anarchy" splashed across the pages in 4-inch letters, but I can't have anything that contains a circle-A symbol. This has been used to deny me publications which featured photos of demonstrations, where a circle-A symbol on a patch on the pants of one of the participants was clearly visible. Similar violations were circle-A symbols that could be seen among the graffiti in the background of photographs. And, since most anarchist publications usually exhibit a circle-A in some manner or another, this gives the prisoncrats an excuse to prohibit them.

Forbid Marking or Cutting

In short, I am being cut off from contact with other anarchists and to a large extent, any mention of anarchist activities, or even activities in which anarchists participate such as mass demonstrations against economic summit meetings and the war in Iraq. The prisoncrats even forbid marking or cutting out the offending circle-A's in order to make their publication palatable for the prisoncrats.

I could challenge this in court, and have contemplated doing so, but for one thing, the case would likely drag on for years and still not be resolved before I'm released October 2006. Also, with my past experience with courtrooms, I know there is little hope for much sympathy, much less a fair hearing. Courts tend to back up prisoncrats' dictatorships.

Lately, though, I've become more and more angry as fewer people write or send literature to me, due to prisoncratic interference. With less mail making it in, each Mail Violation Notice I receive angers and frustrates me all the more. The Oregon Department of Corrections does not have the right to limit my communications with people who hold similar political views.

I'm in prison for being involved in the 1999 street battle with the Eugene Police Department, as part of one of the many anti-globalization days of action that rocked the world from 1999 to 2001. Of all the people arrested around the world during these actions, as far as I know, I'm the only one still in prison. As I mentioned above, the prisoncrats are concerned about having someone in their prison who has more than 20 years of activist experience, much of it as an organizer.

"A" Spells Out Riot

This, added to the fact that I'm an anarchist, spells out "Riot" to the prisoncrats, one of the charges I was convicted of in Eugene, by the way. While incarcerated, I've tried to remain active, writing letters, sending articles to anarchist publications, and encouraging anarchists to be more involved in supporting prisoners.

Rather than go to the courts, rather than waste my time arguing with them, I did what I tend to do, I organized an anarchist protest. I asked people on the outside to send postcards with a circle-A and the caption, "This is not a gang symbol."

We are being singled out for repression because of our political views and because we stand up for our rights as human beings.

For more information about Rob Thaxton, go to www.breakthechains.net or write directly to Rob at: Robert Thaxton, #12112716, OSP, 2605 State St., Salem OR 97310. Don't include a circle A!

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