

# Prison Letter from John

John Sinclair

1969

Sept. 30, 1969

Dear People,

Sorry I haven't written in so long but I wanted to get settled up here before writing you again. There seems to be a lot more going on out there in the streets than happens here in prison, but then that seems to be the idea of locking people up, so they won't be able to participate in the activities they enjoy.

It's much quieter up here in the north country, much colder than you would believe even in the middle of September, and the food is good, which helps too. I read four or five newspapers a day and listen to the news on the radio, read *Time* and *Life* and everything else I can get my hands on so I can be with the people in spirit if not in fact.

One of the most incredible things I've read in a long time has been the series of exposes by the supreme counter-revolutionary "President" Dave Valler, in the Detroit News—the perfect place for that punk. I don't know if you've been following his exploits since he repented and became the number one snitch for the forces of law and order, but he has written some of the most self-serving drivel in the Sunday magazines that anyone could imagine.

There's no doubt—and I have it on good evidence, from people who heard him talking about it at Jackson—that he's just trying to get out from under some of the weight he brought down on himself, and of course everyone concerned is happy to let him babble on for Babylon. The latest rumor I've heard, from the outside world, is that Valler plans to testify for the state in the Detroit conspiracy trials next month—which is really incredible since he was the one who got the dynamite and turned all those other people on to it and coordinated the whole thing! Now he's going to get his own charges dropped and testify against the people he talked into doing the bombing with him! The absolute cynicism of the state is hard even for me to believe sometimes, even though I'm a victim of that cynicism at its worst.

I always knew Valler was a fool anyway when he was on the street, and it's really a crime the way he took in all those poor kids and now is turning on them and writing slanderous and untrue statements about them in the Sunday Detroit News magazine, of all places. There has been a lot of talk about counterrevolutionary elements in the struggle, but as far as I can see Valler is the definition of a counter-revolutionary buffoon, and a dangerous one at that.

I had always felt that he was more or less harmless on the street because his babblings about running for president were so naive and stupid—he used to ask me if he had my "support" in his presidential campaign, and when I told him he was crazy to think that would do him any good, or that the campaign was even worth talking about, he couldn't believe me. "But the people want peace, don't they? They want the kind of government I want to give them, don't they? Then all I have to do is tell them I'm running and they'll elect me." That was his rap.

Now his rap is that marijuana will turn you into a mindless drug addict, because that's what marijuana and LSD did to him and to everyone he knew on the street. It turns people into criminals and crazy maniacs who can't even take care of themselves. And it's even worse than that. The next thing he'll be saying is that the whole drug menace is a bona fide Communist plot financed from Peking and Albania, and the same Communist agents brought the

dynamite in and mixed it with LSD and stole his mind so he didn't know what he was doing but all the other kids that were involved did know and now that he's come to his senses and has been rehabilitated by the state he knows he done wrong and wants to cooperate with the prosecution so everything will be all right and he can get a special parole and go to work writing on the crazy misguided Communist-inspired youth rebellion for the Detroit News. Whew!

That's what comes from spending 8 months in the Wayne County Jail and taking LSD behind bars, and from the state putting a little pressure on a punk who didn't have any sense in the first place. Because if you're weak when you come to prison you'll be destroyed by the time you leave, that much I know for sure.

Another thing I've found out is that it's easier every time to do time—when I was locked up in 1966 in the House of Correction every day was like an eternity, and I didn't think I could possibly stand to do those six months in there. This time it's almost like a vacation—it reminds me of being on the road playing in some place in Connecticut or Ohio and staying in a motel—the main difference being that you can't call home and your stay is more or less permanent. But I just read the papers and write letters and pass the time until I can get some justice in the courts at one stage or another.

I'm working on a book and I work out a lot of ideas about the future of the struggle and the eventual victory of the people. I'm working on some statements and essays and I'll try to send you copies when they're done. I'm also studying a lot of legal decisions that pertain to my appeal, and working on strategy for further dealings with the court.

You know that the Michigan Court of Appeals and the Michigan Supreme Court have both turned down my request for appeal bond, saying that there are no "meritorious grounds for appeal" in my case and that 9-1/2 to 10 years for possession (alleged possession actually) of two joints is a fair and just sentence especially since the conviction was based on evidence that the judge himself has ruled was illegally obtained! But we've always known that the courts could really do anything they want to irrespective of the truth and irrespective of the needs and desires of the people.

Reading back over what I've written I realize that my description of prison life is a little euphemistic, but as you can imagine I've become pretty well adjusted to prison routine and to being away from my people. But it's really not as bad as you would think, and since so many of us will probably spend some time in prisons in the next few years before the people's victory it would be good for people who are active in the struggle to have some idea of what to expect.

But people like David Valler who are weak and cowardly will crack up and go crazy under this kind of pressure, even though anyone who has a clear sense of purpose and the knowledge that his imprisonment is only a temporary thing will be able to withstand the separation from his community and even draw strength from it. As Ho Chi Minh wrote while he was locked up,

Without the cold and desolation of winter

There could not be the warmth and splendor of spring

Calamity has tempered and hardened me,

And turned my mind into steel.

There is another great verse of Ho's that makes me laugh every time I read it, because it's just like the feeling I get sometimes:

The state treats me to its rice,

I lodge in its palace,

Its guards take turns escorting me.

Really the honor is too great.

Being who we are and doing what we be doing out there in the streets, i.e. just a bunch of dope-crazed rock and roll maniacs getting high and having a good time, it really seems weird to realize that the state is scared to death of us and will go to great extremes to get us off the street and out of the public eye. I'm just one example, but when I think of all the shit I've been through at the hands of the state in the last year even, it really makes me wonder.

I got beat up in Oakland County and then charged and convicted for "assaulting a police officer," they held me down and dragged me off in the Oakland County Jail while I was waiting to post bond and cut off three years' worth of hair, they arrested me going to Sarnia for a gig and charged me with the incredible crime of "leaving the country without registering as a convicted narcotics violator/addict" (a crime I'd never even heard of), the U.S. Attorney called me a "transient" and accused me of "fleeing the country to escape prosecution on other charges" so he could get a \$10,000 bond set; the Recorder's Court team took over and got me convicted for possessing two marijuana cigarettes in 1966 even though they were never in my possession, then gave me 9-1/2 to 10 years in prison and refused to set appeal bond because they say I don't have any "meritorious basis for appeal," they arrest my wife in New Jersey for possessing 3 roaches (so they say) and try to get a \$7,500 bond on her, they write stories about my daughter in the paper and make it look like she's going to be abandoned by her narcotics-ridden parents, they run articles on me that are just indescribable, including reports that I was organizing a "resistance movement" in the quarantine block at Jackson and passing petitions around protesting the haircut and shower rules, they ship me to Siberia and say it's "for your own protection," on and on—and I haven't even DONE anything yet.

Look at Abbie and Jerry and Seale and Hayden and them over in Chicago—they try to railroad them like they did me, but they're doing it right and trying their case in the papers because the courts are just a railroad station for the government. At least Colombo didn't try to lock up my attorneys—at least not during MY trial.

But it's like Mao said, it's good to be attacked by the enemy because it shows that you're doing a good job and it helps to further heighten the contradictions in the ruling class so that more and more people can see exactly what's going on—Naked Lunch time, like Burroughs called it, when everyone can see just what's on the end of every fork.

Keep in touch and let me know what's happening with you. I saw those awful pictures in the Free Press the other day when the beasts were pounding the SDS brothers on Woodward. OFF the PIG is all I can say to that, and ALL POWER TO THE PEOPLE!

FREE LOVE! FREE LIFE! FREE EVERYTHING AND EVERYBODY!

Love,

John Sinclair

Political Prisoner

#123507

Box 779

Marquette, MI 49855



John Sinclair  
Prison Letter from John  
1969

<https://www.fifthestate.org/archive/90-october-16-29-1969/prison-letter-from-john>  
Fifth Estate #90, October 16-29, 1969

**[fifthestate.anarchistlibraries.net](https://fifthestate.anarchistlibraries.net)**