

COMMUNICATIONS SECTION  
 When Received (Date) (Time) (Room) (Initials)  
 Give Indicate Full Telephone Number  
 AM BOX 149  
 ATTN: [unclear] 3-1-70

Dear Jacko,

The valentine card you made for me was just beautiful. Some of the other people here received cards too but the were bought from a store. Yours was much better because you made it.

Maybe you have been hearing something about pollution and care of the environment. When your mother and I were in school we didn't learn anything about this subject. We were taught not to use the environment. We didn't about pollution for you.

L. Kollontay

## Letters from Attica and Elsewhere

Whatever else it was, the revolt at Attica was also an eruption of humanity in the hard, brutal landscape of prison life. The shocking contrast between the way the inmates seized control over their own lives and the blood lust of the state, between the thinking behind their carefully articulated demands and the perfunctory and conflicting reasons Governor Rockefeller and other state officials offered in ordering the bloodbath—these elements show dramatically how the individual inmate is caught in the vise of a system that is both illogical and murderous, a system that may be beyond reform.

The uprising at Attica was like a flower trying to push up through concrete. And the catastrophe which unfolded on the grey, teargas-shrouded morning of September 13 was repeated on a smaller scale for each person involved. Many of the participants—blacks and Puerto Ricans who had moved in lockstep from the ghetto to the penitentiary—learned for the first time to think of themselves as political prisoners. Sam Melville, a white, was one prisoner who was in Attica for committing an overtly political crime. Arrested in November 1969 (after being betrayed by a friend who turned out to be a police informer) Melville and others were charged with a series of bombings in Manhat-

tan between July and November of that year. He pleaded guilty to bombing such buildings as Whitehall Selective Service Center and the Chase Manhattan Bank.

Each of the bombings was accompanied by calls to insure that injuries were avoided and by detailed communiques pointing out that the business which transpired within these structures spread death and poverty all over the state.

Born and raised in Buffalo, Melville (born Grossman, but taking the name of the American novelist) was 18 when he moved to New York in the mid-'50s. He made money singing, even working for a time as a cantor. He got to know some communists and helped organize taxi drivers. He held various jobs, one of them in a firm that designed hydraulic systems for buildings; he was asked to move to South Africa with the job, and refused. He was married, had a child, and was divorced.

In 1969 Melville was involved in the demonstrations against Columbia University. Then, as the war droned on, he launched his own offensive against the pillars of New York finance and the war machine, which he saw as real evils, not just symbols.

After his arrest, Melville was sent to the Federal House of Detention in Manhattan. Following two escape attempts,

authorities shipped him off to the Tombs, where he remained until his conviction in June 1970. At the time of his sentencing, the judge chastized him for the \$100,000 worth of damage done to Whitehall. Melville replied, "That's about two Viet Cong." He was sent to Sing Sing and then to Attica on an 18-year sentence.

The letters which follow are both insights into the prison system and testimonials to Sam Melville's lonely courage. Written between 1968 and 1971 most of them are to John Cohen, a close friend; one is to his son, and one to State Commissioner of Corrections Russell Oswald.

## [My dear brother]

I'VE STARTED SEVERAL LETTERS to you and wind up tearing them up thinking they might reflect a mood of despondency i'm not proud of. i'll say your letter and a visit from Sharon picked me up a lot. But my prevailing mood must be called despair. Living among *our* people and taking from amerika that amount i could stomach made me forget the vast waste of inhumanity that dominates this country. Here, i'm struck with the overwhelming insanity of popular opinion and taste without any relief! i don't know how long i'll be able to take prison life. imagine yourself having to go back to our lives of eight or ten years ago when the only break in the monotonous hypocrisy of society was to meet someone else, every once in a while, who felt your loneliness (which came out only as bitterness). Couple this with a world *completely devoid of women!* Mostly, now, i feel whatever i may have hoped to accomplish simply was a waste. Just one more nut who freaked out and took an O.D. or climbed up a tower and fruitlessly gunned down everything in sight. i know there is a Jane and a John and young brothers and sisters with another way, another music, another look, another *smell!* But it's all so unreal here. At first the shock of the arrest and the feeling of a common enemy made me groove on my cellmates, but after a while i began to see so painfully the pettyness and hatred that is their "preferred" makeup. telling myself these are my fellow creatures just doesn't help for very long. i'm not Christ though i might like to think so sometimes. My greatest fear is that my glib answer to the charge of *insanity* was merely a malevolent society's way of dealing with an individual's action which threatens the functioning of that society. Now i'm beginning to realize there are creatures who, driven to despair at finding love, actually doubt their own reasoning apparatus, their own *needs*. I'm told by some that once i get to a bonafide prison, i'll be able to get almost any literature short of pornography and be able to have visits from anyone except co-defendants. It's a slender thread of consolation. My real options are (when i have the courage to face them) : to become an expert in gin rummy or the grand master of postal chess. There really isn't much else. I haven't much hope of beating the rap. When i asked Crain whether i faced five years or fifty, he said with a frown, i'd better figure fifty. John, i don't think i'm strong enough. I think sometimes i have much love for some people and beliefs

but i also know that my response to my environment is that of a pragmatic animal. I seek to satisfy my basic needs . . . not hunger or shelter from a hostile nature; but the soft voice of a woman, the laughter of a shared friend . . . these are my basic needs!

I watched the spectacle of the Army-Navy football game on TV today. The close-ups of the faces sent shutters through me. Strong, crew-cut young men and obedient young women. Uniformed. Cheering. Mad. Completely mad. Camera cut-outs of General Westmoreland. It was a scene i lived twenty years ago. If my personal despair is reading the signs accurately, we're in for very rough times. Maybe we'll all be together soon. Somehow, i hope not.

i love you

## [Dear Jocko]

3/1/70

The valentine card you made for me was just beautiful. Some of the other people here received cards too but they were bought from a store. Yours was so much better because you made it.

Maybe you have been hearing some things about *pollution* and care of the *environment*. When your mother and I were going to school we didn't learn anything about the subject. We were taught only how to use the *environment*. We didn't know about protecting it and caring for it. Now, for you and your friends, and all the living creatures of the world, it is the *most important* part of your education. *Pollution* means to poison and to make unpure. *Environment* means all that is around us including the air, the water and the earth. New York City is your *environment*. The air you breath in New York City is very different from the air in some other places. It's dirtier, thicker and doesn't smell so good. It is even poisonous to some people and many kinds of animals. It is *polluted*. Mainly it is *polluted* because of the gasoline engines in automobiles and buses and all the many factories like Con Ed that send up smoke into the air. If your school teachers are not teaching you anything about this you must begin to ask them questions about it. Ask mommy and talk about it with your friends. If you don't learn about pollution and how you can correct it, soon the air will be so bad that nobody will be able to be healthy.

What I told you about not eating meat is also important to this subject. The animals you eat are part of the *environment*. You must think of them as your fellow creatures to share the earth with.

I still have not received any pictures of you. Please tell mommy to take some and send them to me. I am very lonely and I would like to be reminded of you and the pictures would help.

When you write to me ask me questions about the *pollution* and *environment* and *vegetarianism* (not eating meat) and anything you have been thinking about.

I miss you and I love you.

Daddy.



# [Dear brother]

5-16-70

I THINK THE COMBINATION OF AGE and a greater coming together is responsible for the speed of the passing time. it's six months now & i can tell you truthfully few periods in my life have passed so quickly. i am in excellent physical and emotional health. there are doubtless subtle surprises ahead but i feel secure and ready.

as lovers will contrast their emotions in times of crisis, so am i dealing with my environment. in the indifferent brutality, the incessant noise, the experimental chemistry of food, the ravings of lost hysterical men i can act with clarity and meaning. i am deliberate—sometimes even calculating—seldom employing histrionics except as a test of the reactions of others. i read much, exercise, talk to guards and inmates, feeling for the inevitable direction of my life.

special love to flotsam and brood,  
chalene, lenny, jetsam.

despite by & large a better education and intelligence, the federal prisoners are quite inferior to the state prisoners at chess play. federal inmates have more privileges (diversions) so they don't play as much.

but there's more to it. federal crimes are things like mail theft, forgery, drug smuggling, bank robbery—usually non-violent crimes. whereas state offences often involve assault, even murder & usually include a deadly weapon. state inmates are direct bold individuals living in a not-so-quiet state of desperation. in chess, contrary to popular thinking, the bold aggressive stroke, the brilliant sacrifice will almost invariably triumph over the devious, prudent maneuver. great rigs! a lesson for the revolution?

address your stuff to my cell: 8UA5  
—watch the parking meters.

on monday night (5-11) at about 11 PM the unmistakable blast of dynamite jolted the sleepy inmates. whistles, power calls & right-ons kept us up a long while. it took a full 12-15 minutes for police & fire engines to respond. we learned from a guard the next day it was a garage housing vehicles of city or govt employees. what i saw of the media carried nothing on it. little damage was done although i'm sure it was a large charge & evidently placed in an automobile.

state sentence: June 5  
fed sentence; June 19  
predicted total time: 15 years  
(they haven't got it to give)

just 2 cells away are the two young taiwanese who allegedly attempted to assassinate Chaings heir at the waldorf a couple of weeks ago. they are good, together people & although we are on different walk schedules we have had long harangues about nationalism & the international revolution. i like them very much. with them & two others, we make up the intelligentsia of our block. perhaps not a formidable accomplishment but we do what we can. the other two are: a black actor charged with a shotgun-slaying of a viet marine hero in greenwich village in 1967 (he got a hung jury & the case is still pending after

3 years imprisonment); a frail, impossibly hassidic jew charged with (get ready for this) a knife duel killing of a puerto rican over the favors of a prostitute. moishe is a characture of the brooklyn sect. surely tomorrow is the very last day.

i have little to say regarding out last court appearance & its possible effects. i just don't think folks need further demonstrations of the courts bankruptcy. for the few who were looking forward to some antics there is little revolutionary future. i may be overlooking something & please tell me if i am but in a strict sense Pollack was right: ours is not a political case. we aren't testing the letter or the intent of the law. the *law* is our enemy. with ones enemy it is sometimes expedient to make deals. but to be forced to acknowledge their procedure & rhetoric without denying their authority would be treachery. there are other reasons of course but none the lawyers have been able to comprehend. i leave that to minds with greater tolerance than mine. the panther trials are quite different though. i'm sure you see that.

love to all  
S

Sept. 6, 1970

Dear John,

Attica, formerly the hunting grounds of the Seneca tribe of the Iroquois nation, now the adjuvant, parasitic landscape of the Bethlehem[!] Steel cartel, is now my home. The architecture is best described as expedient Byzantine. The population is predominantly tacit porcine. It shows a lot.

We are not permitted to write about the prison nor to solicit funds or packages—for excellent reasons.

Put the following down on your list for immediate action:

1. Subscribe to the daily [not Sunday] N. Y. Times;
  2. Subscribe to Monthly Review and Trans-Action (Irving Louis Horowitz's magazine);
  3. Transfer about \$20 from the Defense Fund to me here via *postal* money order;
  4. Get a lawyer. I intend to fight before going insane.
- Write soon.*

Sam Melville #26124

Sept. 20, 1970

Actually it's been only about a month since i last heard from you but Attica represented such a cultural shock to me it seems much longer. I'm becoming somewhat acclimated now & tho i lack the double Y chromosome factor of most of my neighbors, i have managed to effect a significantly belligerent enough aspect to gain, if not the respect, at least the acquiescence of my fellow felons.

Owing to my extensive experience in pipe design & music the authorities have assigned me to the Shoe Shop where i have moved quickly into the ranking group of checker players. Penitentiary checkers, which i hope you may never have occasion to play, is somewhat different than the virginal pasttime you may have learned as a boy. This, i think, is owing to the overwhelming ebony influence. The board & pieces are the same but the non-kings are obliged to jump both front & back if the opportunity exists & the kings may jump the entire eight squares or any part of the





Sam Melville

diagonal. It's a little more subtle than your other checkers but somehow i don't envisage becoming passionate about it. The penalties for losing range from 10 to 50 push-ups or 3 "hootchy-cootchies." A hootchy-cootchy consists of placing the hands on the hips and suggestively moving that part of the anatomy the repudiation & shame of which, Freud has submitted. is responsible for the malaise of western civilization. Hootchy-cootchy. by the way, I suspect, has some etymological consanguinity\* with the word the Iroquois used for home-made liquor: hootcheney.

I'm taking steps to be transferred to the school program but as yet i'm termed a security risk which, at Attica, is an absurdity Camus would have difficulty explaining.

Make tracks to get a sub to the Times (not Sunday). There's not exactly a plethora of news reports in the Niagara purlieu. Please don't treat my request for the Oxford English Dictionary & a good thesaurus as a spurious whim. These are to have priority over every other requests i've made including food, money, books or even visits. Should books be easily available by all means have them sent. Any non-fiction title is welcome. I'm especially anxious to read Robt. Jay Lipton's recent Random House pub. &

*Underneath my lids another eye has opened  
it looks nakedly  
at the light*

*that soaks in from the city of pain  
even when I sleep*

*Steadily it regards  
everything I am going through*

*and more*

*it sees the clubs and rifle-butts  
rising and falling  
it sees*

*detail not on TV*

*the fingers of the policewoman  
searching the cunt of the young prostitute  
it sees*

*the roaches dropping into the pan  
where the pork is cooked  
in the House of D*

*it sees  
the violence  
embedded in silence*

*This eye  
is not for weeping  
its vision  
must be unblurred*

*though tears are on my face*

*it must forget  
nothing*

—ADRIENNE RICH

Kate Millet's book which will be permitted here.

I can't expect you to visit up here tho i would like to see your beautiful head again but *please!* write at least a note every 3-4 weeks. I've no word of David & i'm sure his situation is altered since June. I'm not completely free of insecurity & your lack of response sometimes makes me think i'm imposing. Circumstances change folks so quickly now i can't be sure where you're at. Forgive me if that seems lack of fealty. Be assured it is not.

My love to you & our brothers and sisters.

Sam Melville #26124

P.s. We are now allowed instruments. My psychic stock rose 100%. Have you sent those music books & strings?

\*If i had an O.E.D. you might not be burdened with such constructions.

Dear John et al,  
Misc:

Dec. 25, 1970

The Times stopped Dec. 14. I wrote them to ask if the sub expired & if so to renew & send you the bill. Nothing yet. Please check.



Received the package most gratefully. Dates & nuts is real funky food. I wasn't allowed to see the letter in the pack. You should know by now anything that's logical & direct is against the rules.

Got your news of Char. She's beautiful. About receiving Good Times—send it. Send anything. Send everything! Something will get thru. Prison teaches some skills in this regard.

Just after your last visit a bunch of "adventurists" were busted in Lindsayville. I haven't heard anything since. Let me know. Also, what's the denouement of the Seattle conspiracy?

I'm in keelock for the third time in as many months. This will be a 10 day stretch, maybe more. It's better now tho; I'm in C block with a door & window. It's quiet & I can control the heat. The "food" that's passed thru the door I relay on to the wierd creatures who gather at the windowsill. They're the mangiest critters you ever saw. About half the size of crows, brownish-gray. The snow is deep & it's really cold & they shiver so pathetically. Maybe they're a special genus who exist only around prisons. It's for sure they couldn't survive without inmates feeding them.

I sort of welcome the keelock. The school was getting to be a drag. Now I'm working hard on Spanish & reading Trotsky (I copped the one volume at the library). I'm really getting good at Spanish. The feed-up man is puertorican & we rap thru the slot in the door. Before I moved, I worked out almost everyday with the latins in D block. They are fine, generous hermanos y muy aplicados. I used to study with a lady. She was very good but she had this soft way of slurring syllables I found distracting. It wasn't her fault. She spoke english the same way. Even when she spoke Greek she said the same thing. It had nothing what-ever to do with verbs & nouns.

Naturally, I'm spending time with my body. It's not surnuf yoga but the control I'm gaining gives me much confidence. Sometimes my knees & ankles absolutely refuse any cooperation. But I keep right on them, cursing and forcing them to make love with my back muscles. With a lot of imagination, I can even get a little turned on tucking my nose into the scrotum.

I work the guitar some. Not hearing the good sounds or playing with others is very limiting. I'm going to write the folk center & ask Izzy to send some stuff & bill you. Okay?

"The spirit is of no avail against the sword, but the spirit together with the sword will always win out against the sword alone. . . . And I am tempted to tell you that it so happens that we are fighting for fine distinctions, but the kind of distinctions that are as important as man himself. We are fighting for the distinction *between sacrifice & mysticism* [outasite], between energy & violence, between strength & cruelty, for that even finer distinction between the true & the false, between the men of the future & the cowardly gods you revere."

Camus: Letters to a German Friend. 1944.

Love to all.

Sam Melville #26124

merry Christmas

happy tet

I wanna be exchanged for POW's too.

## [Five untitled, undated pages]

Since December 1970, I have been trying to get assigned as a C block porter. I was told by other inmates that if I worked a while in the messhall I would probably get it. Although the messhall work is long hard hours and 7 days per week, you lock in C block and that's where you have to be to get a C block porter assignment. On March 10, I moved to C block assigned to the messhall. I worked hard and co-operated in every way without incident or report until April 30. When I was returning from work at 5:30 I stopped to chat briefly with a friend who locks a few doors away. Virtually all inmates do this every night until the officer on duty rings the bell to lock in.

As I prepared to leave for work the next morning I found I was keep locked. This was Saturday May 1. Since the disciplinary tribunal does not meet on weekends I had to wait until Monday to know the charges against me. The charges read to me in "court" Monday said I refused to lock in when told to by the officer on duty and also that I made a contemptuous gesture to the officer. I of course denied the charge. The charge was signed by an officer Brown. The chief officer Mulrooney then asked me who locked in 36-5 cell, that I felt compelled to speak to every night. I said I didn't see how that was relevant. Mulrooney said he didn't care what I thought was relevant and insisted I answer his question. I said if he wanted to know so badly he could easily look it up. He then sentenced me to 5 days K.L. with 2 days served (the Saturday & Sunday preceding my "court" appearance).

On Wednesday May 5, I was released and reported back to the messhall. The next day I was told to pack up, I was moving. I asked where to and was told one flight downstairs to the C block porters company. Naturally I was glad. I reported to work after moving my things and was told I was an extra, that I would be assigned in a few days.

On Tuesday May 11, I was called in to the desk and told I was moving to D block to be assigned to the State shop (where incoming inmates are fitted for clothing). Normally you are not moved from one block to another unless you request it. I protested I had made no request to move and did not want to move. The officers said they would have to move me if I refused. They suggested I lock in at my new location and I would go to "court" the next day. I did. At court the chief officer said he didn't know why I was moved and that I should put in a request to see the Deputy Warden and he could explain. He further suggested I report to work as assigned to avoid further difficulties. I did as instructed. The next day, Thursday, May 13, I was called to the administration for an interview with Mr. Pfeil, the assistant deputy warden. I asked him why I was moved. He replied Mr. Mancusi had instructed it, that I was a security risk and could better be supervised in D block. I asked in what way was D block any more secure than C block. He replied he was only following orders and if I wanted to see the warden I should put in an interview request.

I returned to my cell and informed the officer on duty I was refusing any further co-operation. I was immediately



K.L. On the next morning, Friday, May 14, I appeared once more before the disciplinary tribunal. I told them I was refusing any further assignment until either I spoke with my attorney or they restored my former assignment as C block porter. They said the warden had ordered the change and they had not the power to move me back. They gave me 7 days K.L. for refusing work.

## [Sent to Commissioner of Correction – June 21, 1971]

June 20, 1971

Dear Mr. Oswald,  
I am in punitive segregation at Attica prison.

Chronology of events:

- May 7: moved without request from C block porter to D block State Shop.
- May 10: interview with Mr. Pfeil to ascertain why I was moved. He said the warden thinks I am better supervised in D block. I refuse to work until restored to C Block.
- May 12: Sentenced to 8 days keeplock.
- May 21: Again refuse to work.
- May 22: Sentenced to keeplock pending interview with Deputy Warden
- June 4: Mr. Vincent sentences me to 30 days in punitive segregation with 15 days lost time.
- June 15: When returning from exercise yard I am told to fold my arms (for the first time). I refuse.
- June 16: Sentenced to "14 days keeplock or until he conforms to rules."

I want to be restored to my former position as C block porter and my lost time returned to me. If I am to remain in punitive segregation I want exercise privileges.

Sam Melville #26124

## [Health Report]

For t past several weeks, since shortly after i entered t box, I have had mild headaches almost daily. T doctor gave me a pill called HPC which didn't help. After a week I complained again & this time i received a small pink pill (enclosed). T doctor refuses to tell me what it is. These seemed to help for a while. During t past week, t intensity of t pain has increased a lot. When i exercise my head pounds unbearably. T pills no longer help at all.

I went on sick call Aug. 3 & told t doctor (Sternberg) i didn't want to keep taking pills that didn't seem to help much & that i thought i should have an examination. Sternberg said very scornfully that other people are now doing my thinking for me, continue taking the pills & go back to my cell.

I protested, trying to control my anger. He cut me off saying my records indicate I was in good health when i entered prison. When i said that was nearly 2 years ago, he replied he knew when it was. He gave me a pass & told me to go to first aid. There my blood pressure was taken and i reported back to the doctor w/ a note stating my b.p. Sternberg said my b.p. was normal & to continue taking t pills. He told t guard to escort me to my cell.

I have no history of this kind of thing & i'm a little worried. My head aches virtually all t time now & any strenuous movement triggers a very heavy throbbing behind t eyes. And it's not exactly comforting to know t mortality rate at Attica rivals that of t Bengla Desh.

August 16, 1971

I was allowed to look at (but not keep) a notice from t pigs saying t following books were reviewed in Albany & I would *not* be permitted to have them:

1. Weatherman
2. Workers World (3 copies)
3. Martin Sostre in Court
4. A True Revolutionary
5. Prisoners Call Out Freedom
6. U.S. Prisons 1971

T notice said I was to choose between sending t books back to t publishers, holding them in my property, or sending them to someone on my correspondence list.

They are also holding, tho no longer admit it, Seize T Time (8 months), Prison Diary of A Revolutionary Priest (at least 3 months) & Five Reports from t Underground Press (one month).

—Duplicate t 2 Ramparts letters, file one set & return one set to me.

—Pig Boyle still terrorizes t halls only now his friends help out.

—Have not received Lib Guardian article

—I have perpetual headaches—no longer taking pills

—Robin was moved to B block metal shop—usually reserved for trouble-makers.

—Dictionary was stolen from my cell.

All rules are now *strictly* enforced. Attire, haircuts, lining up, no talking, no wearing hats—everything. You're busted for dispensing lit, holding meetings, or staring at pigs. We are treated as dogs.

Don't wag your righteous finger at Mancusi & pretend you're shocked. Sue t motherfucker or better yet shoot him. But for christs sake do something.

Sam



*On September 13, just one hour after Cellblock D was declared "secure," Assistant Commissioner of Corrections Walter Dunbar, who had refused to identify those who had been killed and wounded, told newsmen that "Mad Bomber Melville" had been picked off by a sharpshooter. The Young Lords posted an honor guard at his casket and the Black Panther Party members included him in their service for several slain black inmates in New York City. Copyright estate of Sam Melville.*