

Power to the Freshmen, a modest proposal: FRC

To the Class of 1974 and other progressive people:

In spite of innumerable rush books, letters, and personal visits by fraternity men, one thing remains hidden from the incoming MIT freshman who chooses to go through rush week: he and his freshman brothers really hold all the power during rush week!

Fraternities need freshmen to survive, and if freshmen refuse to enter fraternities because of specific practices, then fraternities face only one real alternative: to change those practices to meet the demands of freshmen. Otherwise, fraternities would soon disappear for lack of membership.

A group of freshmen going through rush week in a strong and unified manner could thus effectively make demands to fraternities as pre-conditions for joining them.

For instance, most houses have some type of pledge-training program. In many cases these programs are designed by upperclassmen to help freshmen "adjust" to the new living group. Actually, they impose requirements upon freshmen without the "pledges" having anything to say about them. In most houses pledges are not allowed to vote at or even attend house meetings. Freshmen are thus prohibited from having any say in living group decisions which affect them. They must wait until they have "proved" themselves through their pledgeships before they are "qualified" to help determine living group policies.

What would happen, then, if every freshman going through rush week were to state that he could not live in a house where he did not have an equal voice with others there in running that house? By demanding equal participation before entering fraternities, freshmen have the power to eliminate the subservient pledge status. The demand can be made from a position of great strength if every freshman states his feelings on this matter in every conversation he has with fraternity men during rush week. Fraternities can then either meet the demand or have partially vacant houses.

Freshmen can further use their power to raise other issues during rush week, such as:

- co-ed living groups
- archaic, ritualistic fraternity practices
- political action in living groups
- racist fraternity practices

There can be no quick, clear-cut response to these issues, but freshmen can at least initiate some action in relation to them during rush week. Then, as equal-voting members of a house they could continue this action in the future.

Much of the above material fosters a very negative image of fraternities. In light of this, one fact is very important. The Fraternity Radical Caucus is com-

posed of people who are presently members of MIT fraternities. We consider the experience of collective living too valuable to surrender and have decided to work to change the regressive aspects of our houses while maintaining

the fundamental qualities of group living. There are FRC members in 21 houses, and we are anxious to have freshmen join us who share our enthusiasm for collective living and our determination to make this experience a

better one. For the tremendous potential power that freshmen have during rush week can do more in five days to improve our living groups than we could accomplish in a year.

— Fraternity Radical Caucus

On May 21, George Katsiaticas and Pete Bohmer were jailed after losing an appeal of a conviction on charges of disrupting classes during the January occupation of the offices of MIT's President Howard Johnson. They were also fined \$50 each, and George's mother, Mrs. Chryssoula Katsiaticas, was sentenced to serve 10 days in Charles Street Jail when Judge George Johnson found her in contempt for an outburst she made during George's sentencing. She was released after 6 days.

George and Pete were released on parole early in July, after serving six weeks of two month sentences. George and I talked briefly on July 27. He had lost weight (in prison he'd gotten the crabs) but seemed to be in good health and surprisingly good spirits. His experience had not embittered him but rather had educated him, he said. He does not plan to swerve from the radical life he has chosen despite his imprisonment. Finally, we spoke about his experiences in prison, descriptions of which follow. The excerpts below are reprinted from a taped interview with the two radicals which originally appeared in The Old Mole.

— B.S.S.

BILLERICA:
VOICES
FROM
INSIDE

"The structure revolved around what the person was in for. The people at the bottom of the social ladder, very heavily despised, were the diddlers, the sex offenders. These people got all the worst jobs, and were always being dumped on by both the screws (prison guards) and the inmates. Above them were the winos, old men who were in there for being alcoholics. Those two groups ate together apart from the other inmates. A few months ago the other prisoners had refused to eat with them. Also in there was the Mafia, basically they did a lot of betting on the basketball games, and ran a numbers thing. They provided services for the people there, like giving them an extra towel. There was a group of junkies, and that's who we hung out with mostly."

"I didn't know one guy in there who would not take drugs. Everyone was very heavily into drugs. The first thing that people would say when somebody

was leaving was 'oh, wow, you'll really get it on tonight. A lot of people had habits before they came in and some would talk that they were just going to go back out and get another habit.

"People who come in with a habit, they suffer. There's no treatment. One of the black guys, who had been transferred from Deer Island, he was on a habit when he came in and he was just locked up in a cell."

"If you would ever try and help another guy out, like pick up his mail, the screws would say what are you doing, or if you would show any interest in somebody else, they'd ask you, 'You're sick, aren't you?' They try to keep people very separate. Nothing was communal at all.

"A screw is completely a patronage job, different people in the county pick them. A few of the guys in there are really sick. One guy used to be a Cambridge cop, he's the worst example, he shot some guy in Cambridge and killed him. The guy was reaching for his driver's license, and this incredible paranoid cop shot and killed him because he thought he was reaching for a gun or something. He lost his job on the police force, and now is a guard at Billerica."

"Bridgewater is the real threat. The hole is the immediate threat, like you do this, and you'll get sent to the hole. Like if you don't work for example. Bridgewater is the threat for the people they're really trying to get on. It's kind of like 1984, you know, the thing everybody fears worst is Bridgewater.

"One guy we knew, he had been in the hole, and six guards had beaten him down there, and they kept him for 17 days, and so finally he smashed his head through the window so he would get sent to Bridgewater.

"In Bridgewater segregation, you're locked up all the time, and drugged to sleep except when somebody wants to talk to you and they don't give you your pill. It's an insane institution. They can keep you there as long as they want to, if they can get people to say you're really crazy.

"There's a movie made about Bridgewater, Ticut Follies, which was banned by the Supreme Court. The guys were saying the real reason it was banned was that people would freak out if they knew what was happening. One guy said we hear about how bad the communists are, but he'd been in a P.O.W. camp in Korea, and that was much better than Bridgewater. It freaked this guy out that some American hero had been sent to Bridgewater. It's the thing of being reduced to half existence, and possibly not getting out at the end of your time, and people are really scared of it."

"Once we got put into segregation. It's a long story. Blank paper is illegal. They give you two sheets of stationery a week to write letters on. Everything is censored incredibly heavily. We got a lot of letters from the warden when we left, but I couldn't understand how they were any different than the ones which got through to us in prison.

"So I had my two sheets of paper, and also the back of a letter I had gotten, and I was making notes to myself, about books I'd been reading and also there had been a meeting the day before with all the inmates and Keriakos, the chief warden. I'd made some notes about the meeting, for myself, and I called him a 'smart Fascist.' I had it hidden, inside a letter, inside a book, and I thought I had it very well hidden, but obviously it wasn't. They shook down our lockers and they found this note.

"At the time we were working and they came and yanked us into Keriakos' office. He just began screaming at us, 'Fucking communists, call me a smart fascist will you!'

"First of all I tried to ask what we'd done, but I couldn't get a word out, he was just screaming. He did two tirades about five or six minutes each. He shook his finger at us. 'Call me a smart fascist. I am not a fascist. Lock them up.' Then we got put into segregation. Doug got locked up because he was a friend of mine."

"Racism there is very heavy. Just before we left, the blacks were told they couldn't sit together. The blacks were all sitting together and everyone was laughing and cracking up and people were just being people and the screws came over and said stop the talking. After the meal the blacks were told they couldn't sit together. They talked it over, and decided that they would go into the next meal, which was breakfast, and sit together and confront the screws. They told us what was going to happen and a group of about 30 of us got together, basically the junkies and the radicals formed a coalition with the blacks, so that we would go in front of them and behind them and if any of us were asked to sit between them then we would help them confront that."

"One prisoner, who was kind of a leader in the prison, kept calling us political prisoners, and the sheriff started calling us political prisoners and everybody started calling us political prisoners. In the morning when the papers came out, people were always running up to us and saying did you see this, or what did you think of that. Towards the end, we would get into heavy raps with a lot of guys, as many as fifteen people would come around talking. Often we'd just be sitting there and people would come over and go into a half hour speech about politics, and say what do you think of that."

"The chief warden, Keriakos, called us down to his office the day we were told we were getting out. He's really a sick guy. A few times I'd be called in his office and stuff, and he always would talk about a fight where one of us was going to die and one of us was going to live, and you could never tell what he meant.

"We thought he was going to give us immense shit because some people had come to visit us and tried to give us a Panther paper. They couldn't get in. He looked at us and said, 'It's going to be you or me in the end, I know that.' He was sitting around with his yes men, who were saying yeah, we won World War II and we'll beat you guys. He said he had 23,000 square feet of land and he was going to defend that to his last drop of blood and if we could take that, the rest would be easy."

Second-class postage paid at Boston, Massachusetts. The Tech is published every Tuesday and Friday during the college year, except during college vacations, by The Tech, Room W20-483, MIT Student Center, 84 Massachusetts Avenue, Cambridge, Massachusetts 02139. Telephone: Area Code 617-876-5855; or 864-6900 extension 2731. United States Mail subscription rates: \$4.50 for one year, \$8.00 for two years.

Tuesday, August 4, 1970

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