

# Mass Dissent

Massachusetts Chapter

National Lawyers Guild

14 Beacon St., Boston, MA 02108

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## In This Edition

**Guild News**  
page 3

**When the Heart Howls**  
page 4

**Just Another Blue Ribbon /  
Choke**  
page 5

**Prison Suicides**  
page 6

**Civil Death / The Walpole  
Existence**  
page 7

**Commutation**  
page 8

**Time for a Change / Journey**  
page 9

**A Personal Plea for Help**  
page 10

## MEMBERSHIP MEETING

**October 16, 5:30pm**

14 Beacon St., 1st Fl.  
Boston

## Lives and Rights of Prisoners

It is our tradition to place the October issue of *Mass Dissent* in the hands of jail-house lawyers incarcerated in Massachusetts prisons. This entire issue of *Mass Dissent* is created by and devoted to the daily lives of prisoners and their struggles to survive in a system plagued with prejudice and injustice.

This year, the Guild received an overwhelming number of essays, narratives, and poems from people who have spent years in Massachusetts prisons and who have experienced first hand how the system functions. We have chosen a handful of pieces that reflect on multiple aspects of prisoners issues. We regret not having enough space to publish all articles we've received as all of them were powerful and informative.

There are several patterns that are present in the pieces printed in this issue. First, the prison system is not properly structured. Perhaps a "necessary evil" in a civil

society, but the improper structure allows countless injustices and leads to enormous human suffering. Second, the executors of the law - employees of correctional institutions - understand "punishment" only in terms of cruelty and inhumanity which leads to unnecessary anguish and pain inflicted on inmates. (Incidents of suicide among prisoners are common but usually ignored.) Third, the degrading and inhuman physical conditions in prisons take away any sense of humanity from those confined there.

However, no matter how painful and helpless the situation might appear, there is still a light of hope detected in most of the writings - hope for a change and "hope for a chance."

We would like to thank all prisoners who sent their written work for this publication and encourage them to continue their writing.

- Editors -

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## *Join a Guild Committee*

**Street Law Clinic Project:** Community legal education workshops on 4th Amendment Rights (Stop & Search), Landlord/Tenant Disputes, Workers' Rights, Civil Disobedience Defense, and Immigration Law. Conceptualized and coordinated by Guild lawyers and law students, the Street Law Clinic project provides workshops for the Boston community which address community legal needs. Clinics are held at community organizations, youth centers, labor unions, shelters, and pre-release centers. If you are a student, legal worker or attorney interested in leading workshops, contact the Project at 617-723-4330 or nlgmass-slc@igc.org.

**"No to MBTA Searches":** Works in coalition with the American Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee, American Friends Service Committee and ACLU of Massachusetts to stop searches on the MBTA. If you would like to be involved in the campaign, either on its political or legal end, please call the office at 617-227-7335.

**Lawyer Referral Service Panel:** Members of the panel provide legal services at reasonable rates. Referral Service Administrative/Oversight Committee members: Neil Burns, Neil Berman, Joshua Goldstein, Jeremy Robin, and Azizah Yasin. For more information, contact the Referral Service Coordinator at 617-227-7008 or nlgmass@igc.org.

**Independent Civilian Review Board:** In coalition with the American Friends Service Committee and Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights, the NLG has been pushing for the creation of an independent civilian board to review complaints against Boston police officers. To get involved in the campaign, please contact the office at 617-227-7335.

**NLG National Immigration Project:** Works to defend and extend the human and civil rights of all immigrants, both documented and undocumented. The Committee works in coalition with community groups to organize support for immigrant rights in the face of right-wing political attacks. Ongoing projects include asylum advocacy and the rights of immigrant minors. For more information contact the NLG National Immigration Project at 617-227-9727.

**NLG Military Law Task Force:** Provides legal advice and assistance to those in the military and to others, especially members of the GIRights Hotline, who are counseling military personnel on their rights. It also provides legal support and helps to find local legal referrals when needed. The MLTF and the Hotline exchange many questions and information through their listserves. Calls to the GIRights Hotline from phones in New England are handled from the AFSC office in Cambridge. To get involved, please contact Neil Berman (njberman2@juno.com) or Marguerite Helen (mugsm@mindspring.com).

#### **COALITIONS:**

**Jobs with Justice**, a coalition-based organization addressing workers' rights. The NLG is a member of Jobs with Justice; any interested Guild members can attend meetings & events.

# GUILD NEWS

## NLG HAPPY HOUR

The NLG Massachusetts Chapter is excited to announce a new social event for all Guild members and non-Guild lawyers and law students who are progressive and support public interest law. The Happy Hour will be on the 2nd Wednesday of each month at **FELT (533 Washington St., 2nd Fl., Boston, 617-350-5555)** - a great club with pool tables. The first Happy Hour - with appetizers provided - will be on **Wednesday, October 10, 2007 from 5:30-7:30**. We hope to see you and your legal friends there.

**We'll start at 5:30pm with a 30-minute wine reception and follow with a discussion** of national resolutions and amendments proposed for a debate at the National Convention in Washington, D.C. (more info below).

## NATIONAL CONVENTION

You have only a couple weeks to register for the NLG National Convention - *Seventy Years of Law for the People*. The Convention will be in Washington, DC at **the Holiday Inn on the Hill** (415 New Jersey Ave., NW.) from **Wednesday, October 31 to Sunday, November 4, 2007**. Past women presidents of the Guild will be honored: Doris Brin Walker, Mary Alice Theiler, Debra Evanson, Karen Jo Koonan, Catherine Roraback, and Barbara Dudley. To register please visit [www.nlg.org/convention](http://www.nlg.org/convention) or call 212-679-5100.

## MEMBERSHIP MEETING

All Guild members are invited to the Chapter's Annual Membership Meeting ([nlgmass-director@igc.org](mailto:nlgmass-director@igc.org)), which will take place on **Tuesday, October 16, 2007**.

### GRANTS FROM MBF AND BBF

The NLG Massachusetts Chapter has been awarded two grants to fund the Street Law Clinic project in 2008.

The **Massachusetts Bar Foundation** continues to support the SLC with a \$20,000 grant for 2008. The grant will be used to cover 2/3 of the project's operating costs.

The **Boston Bar Foundation** has awarded the project a grant of \$15,000. The grant will help fund the project's expansion.

The SLC is grateful for the grants and is thrilled to now have a stronger financial basis for growth.

### CONGRATULATIONS TO CECELY REARDON!

The NLG congratulates our comrade **Cecely Reardon** on being honored with the John Brooks Award for outstanding public service.

**Way to go, Cecely!**

### Passing of NLG member Craig Robinson

With sadness we inform you about the unexpected passing of **Craig Robinson**, 54, a loyal member of the NLG Massachusetts Chapter and Lawyer Referral Service. Born in Hartford, CT, Craig was a graduate of Western New England College School of Law and worked as the general council for many Postal Workers Unions and several Federal Unions throughout New England. We send our condolences to Craig's wife Linda Tonoli and son, Christian Robinson.

### **Cambridge Office for Rent:**

Large sunny office two blocks from Central Sq. and Red line in suite with other Guild lawyers. Rent of \$775/month includes secretarial services, receptionist, use of conference room, high speed internet connection. Call Richard Klibaner or Jamie Sabino at 617-492-5085.

### ARTICLES FOR MASS DISSENT

The November issue of *Mass Dissent* will focus on **employment law and workers' rights**.

If you are interested in submitting an article, essay, analysis, or art work (cartoons, pictures) related to the topic, please e-mail the articles to [nlgmass-director@igc.org](mailto:nlgmass-director@igc.org).

***The deadline for articles is October 15th.***

# *When the Heart Howls*

*by Wayne B. Alexander*

The heart howls in here.

Here where the count happens at 7:15, 11:40, 5:00 and 10:00  
Here where the halogen lights are evenly spaced on a nineteen foot wall,  
Here where getting sick feels like the flip of a coin for treatment,  
Here where fear gets amplified and the claws of depression sink in relentlessly.

The heart howls in despair, grief, in remorse,

But, there are no vocal chords in a heart.  
No sound emanates from a heart, but the howls are  
Low, then Loud, Lingering and Loathsome.

The heart howls in here.

Howls to be forgiven for atrocious cruelties,  
Howls to be excused for heinous actions,  
Howls to be exempt from escalating melancholy,  
Howls to say, "I'm sorry," so genuine that angels weep

The heart howls in here.

With shame, with loss, with regret, with hope.

The heart howls with Hope.

Hope for a chance to apologize,  
Hope for a chance to make amends,  
Hope for a chance to change another heart that howls,  
Hope for a chance.

When the heart howls, the devil may laugh, but the soul takes notice.

---

*Wayne Alexander is an inmate at Bay  
State Correctional Center in Norfolk.*

## *Just Another Blue Ribbon: Commission Report Regarding the Criminal Justice System*

by *Brian Jennings*

In June 2004, the Massachusetts Governor's Commission of Corrections Reform released what we know as the "Harshbarger Report" (H-Report). The Commission called upon everyone to step up to the plate for the common good of our state. But as Scott Harshbarger served as Chairman of the Commission and, as realization set in that the H-Report went seemingly disregarded, Mr. Harshbarger retired from any dealings or handling of the Commission and report.

In June 2006, the U.S. Commission on Safety and Abuse in America's Prisons released a national version of the H-Report entitled "Confronting Confinement" (C-Report). Like the H-Report, this report showed that prisoners are being treated like animals or possibly even worse.

To those imprisoned, those who work in the criminal justice system, and those who have family members and loved ones in any of our country's prisons none of the reporting is a new discovery or occurrence. This problem is compounded by the Massachusetts Correctional Officers Union Website's Ten Commandments which include, "thou shall not 'rat' on each other."

No one is disputing that being a prisoner certainly does encompass its punitive function, or that prisoners shouldn't live in comfort. But this is not a matter as to what constitutes comfortable conditions of confinement and never has been. And it is only a matter of time before another blue ribbon commission finds what the previous commissions have already

found. Just another form of costly repetition attributed to the criminal justice system in our state and throughout America.

We are in great need for the Commission's key players to step up to the plate for the common good of our state. A very simple step that should be forthcoming is the requirement that rehabilitative

services be, at minimum, a part of each of our prisoner's conditions of confinement, rather than a discretionary assignment by correction or other officials.

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*Brian Jennings is incarcerated in Souza-Baranowski Correctional Center in Shirley.*

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### *Choke*

by *Omar Abdullah*

Thin line  
Twisted strands of fiber  
Hanging,  
Pulling,  
Tugging,  
Tying,  
Tightening around my throat  
Causing me to choke.

Woven into a knot  
So I can't talk.  
My feet  
Are stretching to the ground  
But still,  
There is no sound.

Just look deepdown inside  
These eyes,  
And tell me  
Will I survive that last cry for help?

If only there was hope  
To loosen this rope.

---

*Omar Abdullah is an inmate at Bay State Correctional Center in Norfolk.*

## *Prison Suicides: The Danger of Manufacturing Hopelessness*

by Ed Bowser

Several weeks ago I heard the news of yet another prisoner who had committed suicide while in the custody of the Massachusetts Department of Correction. Steven Koumaris, though not yet 50 years old, had served more than 30 years in prison for a crime he committed as a teenager. At the time of his suicide in early October he was housed at the Old Colony Correctional Center (OCCC) in Bridgewater.

What struck me most about this particular suicide was the fact that I knew Stevie many years ago. Our contact was superficial and based solely on the fact that we were both young 'lifers' housed in the same prisons so I don't know many of the details of Stevie's life before prison. I do know that we both entered the prison system as teenagers in the mid-1970s.

I knew others over the years of my incarceration who have taken their own lives, but the news of Steve Koumaris' suicide seemed to be something I could not stop thinking about. The obvious question—why?—weighed heavily on my mind. Reports of prisoner and staff abuses leading up to Stevie's death were already circulating around the prison system. At least one prisoner alleged that Steve had been sexually assaulted by two other prisoners and that staff response was anything but appropriate.

So, while the obvious reasons for Steve's death were becoming known, I became aware of what it was that dis-

turbed me so much about his suicide. I realized that I could relate to the underlying feelings of isolation and despair that most certainly must have preceded his decision to bring an end to his own personal suffering.

Of course, it is impossible to know for sure what went through Steve's mind before he did it. We can be sure, however, that he was not thinking that life was worth living or that there was some hope for a brighter future.

*Though I don't  
recall ever having a  
conscious thought  
of killing myself,  
I began shredding  
a bed sheet into  
long strips.*

Though people have different reasons for committing suicide, I am convinced that the underlying feelings that precipitate the act itself are universal. These feelings include a very deep and abiding sense of isolation, hopelessness, despair, and loneliness. The magnitude of the emotional and psychological pain is so deep and so intense that it feels like the only way out, the only way to end the pain, is through death.

My own experience with the thought of suicide arose after

receiving my second parole denial in 1994. My first parole denial after serving 15 years was painful, but the second was a devastating blow. I had already served 18 years at that point and had completed every rehabilitative program available to me, including earning a Bachelors Degree from Boston University, spending nearly eight years in minimum security, completing 49 unsupervised furloughs and spending 5 days a week in service to the community through two programs that I was instrumental in creating.

As I walked back to my cellblock with the decision in hand, every step I took seemed to take every bit of energy I could muster. The buildings around me seemed to be getting bigger and I felt as though I were shrinking. By the time I made my way back, I felt smaller and more insignificant than I ever had in my life. Everything seemed distant and surreal. All I could think about was how the news of another denial was going to hurt the people that I loved and cared about. In particular, I was concerned about the impact that I knew this decision would have on the woman who had dedicated the last 11 years of her life to me. As I thought about the look of disappointment and pain in her face when I delivered the news of the first denial three years earlier, I walked directly past the telephone feeling the deepest sense of sadness and hopelessness I had ever experienced in my life. I sat on my footlocker and felt a numbness come over me and it was as if I were looking at the world through a veil.

*Continued on page 11*

## *Civil Death and the Third-Class Citizen*

by *Robert Ferreira*

Today in the U.S. there exists a new, if less desirable, social class: the ex-offender. The ex-offender is now considered at best a third-class citizen with severely limited opportunities in the workplace, housing markets, and even restricted voting rights. Ex-offenders face several formidable hurdles upon reentry into society. The first and possibly toughest challenge facing the ex-offender is the restoration of his self-esteem and sense of personal dignity. Reestablishing family ties and securing employment are also paramount in reintegrating into society.

Anyone returning to the community after serving time in the U.S. prison system can expect to experience severe social ostracism. Ex-offenders are increasingly targeted by restric-

tive state and federal legislation ranging from sex-offender registries to restrictions on voting rights. All this tough on crime, knee-jerk legislation has accomplished is the creation of a third-class citizen.

Once released from prison the ex-offender faces several formidable hurdles, starting with the mental trauma inflicted upon him at the hands of prison administrators which will affect the ex-offender's self-esteem. The ex-offender needs to understand that no one is merely the sum total of his or her worst deeds. If the ex-offender can maintain a strong sense of self respect and dignity, his or her reintegration and transition into a productive member of society will occur in a more positive manner.

Family issues can also become extremely stressful for the ex-offender and their families. On their release, the ex-offend-

er's family will now be relied on to support him in his time of need. Sadly, this reliance puts stress on everyone involved.

Nowhere is the growing U.S. trend to ostracize ex-offenders more evident than in the workplace. After spending lengthy periods in prison, most ex-offenders emerge from prison with no marketable skills. This is due to budget cuts in the penal system's education programming. Once released, most ex-offenders find that they are unemployable. This alarming situation is further exacerbated by many state laws that prohibit them from engaging in certain occupations. While it is true that certain types of ex-offenders should be prohibited from some vocations, lines need to be drawn on the broad application of this policy. Without a good paying job it is a foregone conclusion that the ex-offender will re-offend. Let's face the facts, everyone has to eat.

Sadly, in this century, the ex-offender can never fully repay his debt to society. Having served his sentence, he finds that it was not the initial debt that he needed to concern himself with. Rather, it was the civil death he would experience after prison that would mark the ex-offender for life. If this trend is allowed to continue, we as a society will condemn millions of people to a marginal existence on the fringe of society.

---

### *The Walpole Existence*

by *Bill Haberek*

Served Swill 3Xs daily,

Not allowed to clip toe/finger nails,  
Allowed one Toothbrush every 90 days,  
Allowed one shaving razor weekly.

No true health care, or Programs,  
Not allowed to move to lower Security.

In the end, the one thing I dread;  
Not to be worthy of my suffering.

---

*Bill Haberek is an inmate at Massachusetts Correctional Institution in South Walpole.*

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*Robert Ferreira is incarcerated at Bay State Correctional Center in Norfolk.*

## Commutation - Ending Life Behind Bars

by Benjamin Evans

In Massachusetts, where there has been no law allowing for the death penalty since 1984, and where the Commonwealth last executed a prisoner in 1947, there are still people who may be held in prison for their entire lives, usually for the crime of murder. For these people, the only hope is commutation. The commutation process is governed by statute, M.G.L. ch.127, §§ 152-167, and by regulation, 120 CMR 901.00-13. All inmates are eligible to apply for commutation at any time, they need only request a petition from the Executive Secretary to the Governor's Executive Council or the Advisory Board of Pardons, and then submit the completed application. However, it is important to note that a "[c]ommutation of sentence generally is not available to individuals who fail to exhaust all other administrative and judicial remedies." 120 CMR 901.01(2). In addition, the regulations of the Massachusetts Parole Board explain what a prisoner must show "in order to merit consideration." 120 CMR 901.01(1).

After being sentenced to spend the rest of one's life in prison, what could one do to meet the criteria for commutation? Arnold King's work for the past several decades may be one example, depending on the outcome of a hearing this month. King is currently incarcerated at the Baystate Correctional Center in Norfolk and has been in

Massachusetts prisons since he was 18. In October of 1971, King shot and killed John Labanara, a law student who was celebrating after taking the bar exam.

However, what distinguishes King is how he has used his time in prison to transform himself from a teenage dropout and a

Prison Voices and the Caminemos Project.

After his last hearing before the Advisory Board of Pardons in 2004, where he was represented by Guild attorney Margaret Burnham, the Board recommended that King be considered for commutation. Unfortunately

Governor Romney never acted on that recommendation. Now King has a new hearing scheduled for Thursday, October 25th, 2007.

King has offered his life's work in atonement for the life he took three decades ago. During the three decades he has been incarcerated King has come to represent the promise that even people who commit horrible crimes can redeem themselves. Can even those of us who have done the worst things have the capacity to change and to

become admirable people? One answer can be found in the life of Arnold King.

*More info:*

<http://www.massdecarcerate.org/throughbarbedwire/index.html>

<http://www.arnoldking2007.org>

*Benjamin Evans is a public defender at the Committee for Public Counsel in New Bedford.*

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drug addict, to a respected counselor to youth about the importance of avoiding the mistakes he made. He has earned an MA and a BA from Boston University. He continues to consult with schools on youth issues and criminal justice and to counsel students, parents, and educators and to organize community events, such as the 4th Friday events at the Community Church of Boston. He founded Through Barbed Wire in 1996 and co-founded

## Time for a Change?

by Timothy J. Muise

**G**overnor Patrick's campaign slogan was "Time For A Change". My prayers are that he is truly planning to apply this to the draconian Massachusetts Department of Correction (DOC). Initially, the Governor had indicated he wanted to make a complete decapitation of the administrative hierarchy. This is the only plan that will be successful in breaking down the barriers of the good ole boy network in the DOC. Too many DOC employees are beholden to their pals and cohorts. Nepotism is the fruit of the vine in this system and officials are drunk with power.

The DOC has had a huge rise in the rate of suicides. Prisoners have been kept in custody way beyond their release dates. Men and women are being refused treatment for life threatening diseases. An arrogant guard's union holds the system hostage. These are all sure signs of just how sick the system is. What's the cure? I will admit it is a complicated and multifaceted problem, but it is clear that it is time for new blood. The same names in the administration move from institution to institution, from job to job. All administrative personnel, from the commissioner right down to the institutional superintendents, must go.

We have teenage offenders languishing in life terms. These young men and women deserve another chance and better representation within the system. Further, there are numerous elderly prisoners who no longer

belong behind bars. Also, there are non-violent offenders in high security prisons who need treatment rather than incarceration. Very little rehabilitative opportunities that actually work are afforded to the general prison population. There are a myriad of complex problems and it is crystal clear that the current administrative hierarchy has failed to shed any light on these ever increasing problems and they need to go.

Bob Dylan once sang, "Any day now, any day now, I shall be

released." Release is a powerful word in the prison world. This system needs to be released from the current stagnating grip of a cancered administrative hand. It is truly time for a change, Governor Patrick. Please bring it on.

---

*Timothy Muise is incarcerated in Souza-Baranowski Correctional Center in Shirley.*

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## Journey

by Timothy Muise

Youth folly shapes tragic adult,  
Disbelief's unimaginable nightmare,

Broken love's thin worn soul,  
Buried pain's powdered substances.

Hope's late reckoning breaths,  
Desperate gasps balloon weak lungs,  
Distant surface, stiff fingers claw,  
Doubt creeps as strength prevails.

Dawn's rising proves clear,  
Another chance second coming,

This day lived true,  
Destination revealed through journey.

## *A Personal Plea for Help*

**D**ear National Lawyers Guild,

I'm writing to you as my last resort and I hope I will reach some sympathetic souls.

Do prisoners really have rights once they have walked through the prison gates? Imagine spending many years in a segregation control unit, locked in a cell 23 hours a day, and what mental defects this might inflict upon a person? Will they make it out alive? Or perhaps become a mental health patient? What happens when a prisoner is denied medical treatment or is misdiagnosed? Who can help an indigent person incarcerated in a Massachusetts prison?

There are many more questions and issues that I can get into about the lives of prisoners, but rather than doing that, I need to bring to the public's attention information about my friend who is laying up in a prison hospital with bone cancer and estimated six months to live.

The prison doctors told my friend "Jose Davila" that he has bone cancer that now has spread throughout his body, and that he has less than six months to live. My friend is not from the United States nor does he have family here. His motherland is Puerto Rico and all his family resides there. His ability to speak, read or write English is very poor. The little bit he knows was learned in prison by himself just to survive.

My friend is only 30 years old. When he first went to see a doctor, he was misdiagnosed for having a different illness for which he was treated. After a while, it became obvious that the treatment was incorrect, so he was exam-

ined again and it was determined that he had bone cancer. But if he was correctly diagnosed in the first place, the cancer would have been caught and perhaps with a treatment at least stopped from spreading.

I guess my friend didn't matter to the doctors or anyone else - he is from another country,

he is a prisoner who doesn't have too many rights anyway; he just has an I.D. number.

I wrote my friend and told him that "I will do whatever is in my power to not let you die in a prison hospital. I'll try to get you a 'medical pardon release', so you could return to Puerto Rico and be around your family

members and die in peace."

This is all what I can do for my friend - I can try to help him get the medical release.

But who am I? just another prisoner with an I.D. number. Will my voice be heard? Is there anybody out there that can help me?

By the time this letter is published in *Mass Dissent*, I think my friend will have about four months to live. I need your help.

Please write me at P.O. Box 100, South Walpole, MA 02071.

I can't let my friend die in a prison hospital. Help me achieve that.

Albert Ford  
Massachusetts Correctional Institution  
South Walpole

*I will do whatever  
is in my power  
to not let you die in  
a prison hospital [...].  
This is all what  
I can do for you,  
my friend.*

## Massachusetts Chapter Sustainers

In the spring of 2003, the Massachusetts Chapter of the NLG initiated its new Chapter Sustainer Program.

Since its inception, the Program has been very successful and has been enthusiastically joined by the following Guild members:

**Adkins, Kelston & Zavez; Jane Alper; Michael Avery; Samuel Berk; Neil Berman; Melinda Drew & Jeff Feuer; Howard Friedman; Benjie Hiller; David Hoffman; Stephen Hrones; Martin Kantrovitz; David Kelston; Leslee Klein & Mark Stern; William Newman; Petrucelly & Nadler; Allan Rodgers; Martin Rosenthal; Sharryn Ross; Anne Sills & Howard Silverman; Judy Somberg; and Stern, Shapiro, Weissberg & Garin.**

This is one of the most important initiatives the Chapter has undertaken to secure its future existence. Please consider joining the Program. We need you in order to have a strong and active Guild!

### YES, INCLUDE MY NAME AMONG NLG MASSACHUSETTS CHAPTER SUSTAINERS

I, \_\_\_\_\_, am making a commitment to support the Massachusetts Chapter of the Guild with an annual contribution of:

\_\_\_\_\_ \$500 (not including my membership dues)

\$\_\_\_\_\_ (Other above \$500)

#### As a Sustainer I will receive:

- Special listing in the Dinner Program;
- 1/8 page ad in the Dinner Program;
- Acknowledgement in every issue of *Mass Dissent*;
- Two free raffle tickets for the December Holiday Party;
- Invitation to a Guild reception.

*Please mail to:* NLG, Massachusetts Chapter  
14 Beacon St., Suite 407, Boston, MA 02108

## Prison Suicides

*Continued from page 6*

Though I don't recall ever having a conscious thought of killing myself, I began shredding a bed sheet into long strips. I then stripped down and headed to the shower room with the strips of bed sheet in my hand. Once I was in the shower, I tied the sheets securely around the showerhead and turned the water on. I stood there in the stream of water thinking this will end it. No more disappointments, no more pain. A sudden release of tears caused me to squat down under the stream of water. With my head in my hands, I began to think of how the news of my death would impact my loved ones. The thought of them being told I was found hanging in a prison shower suddenly seemed

selfish and grotesque. From outside of the shower I heard someone asking who was next in the shower. I said nothing, I simply untied the bed sheets, gathered up my stuff, and returned to my cell.

Recent conversations with other prisoners about the subject of suicide have been an eye-opening experience. While it is common in the testosterone filled cellblocks of most prisons to label anyone who commits suicide as weak, the number of men who have admitted that they had considered and/or attempted suicide at some point in their incarceration is mind-boggling. From March of 2005 through October 2006, there have been on average over 1 suicide every 3 months.

The Massachusetts prison and parole systems have manu-

factured a very real and very dangerous hopelessness among prisoners. Over the past 17 years or so, the Department of Correction and the Parole Board have continued to implement more and more restrictive policies which have resulted in overcrowded conditions, prisoners serving longer sentences and ultimately stripping many prisoners of any hope for a brighter future. The net result of this is to guarantee that there will be more suicides in this so-called era of reform.

*Ed Bowser is an inmate in Bay State Correctional Center in Norfolk.*

# Mass Dissent

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"... an association dedicated to the need for basic change in the structure of our political and economic system. We seek to unite the lawyers, law students, legal workers and jailhouse lawyers of America in an organization which shall function as an effective political and social force in the service of people, to the end that human rights shall be regarded as more sacred than property interests. Our aim is to bring together all those who regard adjustments to new conditions as more important than the veneration of precedent; who recognize the importance of safeguarding and extending the rights of workers, women, farmers, and minority groups upon whom the welfare of the entire nation depends; who seek actively to eliminate racism; who work to maintain and protect our civil rights and liberties in the face of persistent attacks upon them; and who look upon the law as an instrument for the protection of the people, rather than for their repression."

*Preamble to the Constitution of the National Lawyers Guild, originally adopted February 22, 1937, and most recently amended in July 1971.*

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