



BIOGRAPHIES

his store, which the authorities perceived as a threat. It remained open and packed well into the night as people rebelled against police forces.

Eventually, authorities resolved to deal with the defiant Sostre by attacking and ransacking his store. He and Geraldine Robinson (his co-defendant) were imprisoned on narcotics and riot charges. He was convicted after the rebellion in Buffalo had died down and sentenced to 31 to 41 years in jail by an all-white jury. Sostre was gagged in court but was unfazed by what he described as a “foolish” attempt to silence him.

He later wrote that he was demonstrating “the weakness of this fascist beast” in the courtroom and encouraged Black people to look at what he was doing to the oppressor. Sostre promised to be consistently confrontational, and from prison, he encouraged Black people to “Defy white authority!,” setting an example through his actions.

He maintained his innocence, and in the 1974 documentary *Frame-Up!* he distinguishes “between a political prisoner in its classical sense and a politicized prisoner.” He categorizes himself as the latter, as someone “who has become politically aware while in prison, even though the original crime that he committed was not a political crime.”

Martin also won a case about the censorship of literature in prison. He recalled fighting so hard so there could be more political literature in prison than there ever had been before. While being imprisoned, he was still doing the political education work that he previously did in the community. He claimed several victories in court for the rights of those in prison, from political and religious freedoms to restricting the use of solitary confinement. He himself had been subjected to the torture of solitary confinement, had his mail tempered with and was subjected to intimidation — all because of his work. But Sostre remained true to his cause.

Introducing anarchism

Sostre was a fierce critic of leadership, authority and imperialism. He was fiercely opposed to empire and identified with the anti-imperialist efforts. In a 1967-letter from prison, Sostre writes, “I will never submit. The employment of the massive coercive power of the state is not enough to make me give up; I am like a Viet Cong — a Black Viet Cong.” He goes on to say the Vietnamese fight against imperialism was an example he was trying to live up to. He consistently connects the global struggle against US imperialism to the struggle for Black liberation.

