



He insists that “only by challenging and opposing their lies and acts in the streets, courtroom and battlefield will we defeat the fascist oppressors.” In another letter from the same year he says one of the first things he is going to do when he leaves prison is “establish a defense fund” because no one should have to be imprisoned “because bail couldn’t be met.” In another letter, dated 1968, he even criticizes “no-knock” police raids and stop-and-frisk as signals of a coming right-wing takeover. Sostre was ahead of his time in many ways.

In 1971 the primary “witness” against Sostre recanted his testimony and admitted he had helped frame Sostre so he himself could be released from jail. This happened in addition to a national campaign for Sostre’s freedom, who had since become a well-known imprisoned radical and was eventually ordered to be released from solitary confinement. It was done by order of the US District Court Judge Constance Baker Motley, who was the first Black woman appointed to the federal bench. She also awarded him damages and he was eventually granted clemency after gaining notoriety in a campaign for his freedom.

Sostre’s immeasurable contributions also had a big impact on the life and thought of Black anarchist Lorenzo Kom’boa Ervin. It was Sostre who introduced the former Black Panther Party member to anarchism after they met in federal detention. Lorenzo had been sentenced to life in prison after hijacking a plane to Cuba while fleeing weapons charges in the US. Ervin had become disillusioned after his time living in Cuba, Czechoslovakia and East Germany. He remembered his life under “Soviet socialism” as “elitist, authoritarian, and oppressive.” He argued, moreover, that Marxist-Leninist Maoism had “helped to destroy the 1960’s New Left, and the radical wing of the Black Power Movement, with cult of personality, middle class snobbery, manipulation, and opportunism.”

Lorenzo reflected on Sostre’s anarchist lessons:

“He bounced a new word on me: ‘Anarchist Socialism.’ I had no idea what he was talking about at the time ... He explained to me about ‘self-governing socialism,’ which he described as free of state bureaucracy, any kind of party or leader dictatorship. Almost every day he regaled me about ‘direct democracy,’ ‘communitarianism,’ ‘radical autonomy,’ ‘general assemblies,’ and other stuff I knew nothing about. So I just listened for hours as he schooled me.

Lorenzo based much of his efforts around Black Autonomy, his own jailhouse litigation and his “Free Lorenzo” campaign that resulted in his freedom on Sostre’s instructions. Through Lorenzo, Sostre indirectly inspired a new generation of Black anarchists (myself included).

