Who is Joe-Joe Bowen?

Joe-Joe Bowen is a Black Liberation Army (BLA) Prisoner of War, serving two life sentences for actions carried out against a prison warden and deputy warden, as well as, an attempted prison break, which resulted in a five-day standoff.

As a teen, Joe-Joe Bowen was a member of Philly's 30th and Norris Street gang. While serving a five-year prison sentence for a social crime, Joe-Joe was introduced to revolutionary politics. From this point on he was determined to dedicate his life to the people's liberation movement.

Joe-Joe was released in 1971 and intended to join the struggle on the streets. His involvement, however, would be short lived when a week after his release, on February 21, 1971, he found himself in a gun battle with the Philadelphia police. In the end a cop laid dead and Joe-Joe was sentenced to 10 to 20 years in prison.

“I ain’t no angel. I'll do my time. All we want is to be recognized as what we are, human beings.”
- Joe-Joe Bowen

During those days Philadelphia police had a reputation of corruption and brutality, especially against the emerging Black Liberation Movement. In 1970, police engaged in a 2-hour assault against the Philly Black Panther cadre, after which, the police forced the captured combatants to strip naked while the press took pictures. This was also the police force who years later, pinned a murder of cop on a former Black Panther and journalist, Mumia Abu-Jamal.

1973 Attack on the Warden

On May 31, 1973, Joe-Joe and Black Liberation Army POW, Fred Muhammad Burton, assassinated the warden and deputy warden and hospitalized the guard commander at Philadelphia's Holmesburg prison. This attack was in response to intense repression and Muslim religious persecution. He was sentenced to two life sentences for this action.

After his sentence, he was held in solitary confinement. In an interview with a Philadelphia reporter, Bowen stated, “You reach a point of rage in the hole, and then you got to come out of there. That’s when you move to the extreme left, the extreme right, or you self destruct.”

“I used to teach the brothers how to turn their rage into energy and how to understand their situation,” he said. I don’t threaten anybody. I don’t talk to the pigs. I don’t drink nothing I can’t see through, and I don’t eat anything that comes off a tray. When the time comes, I'll be ready.”

1981 Prison Standoff

In October 28, 1981, Joe-Joe lead a mass liberation attempt from the state's largest prison at Graterford, after arming other prisoners with two shotguns and two revolvers. Bowen and three others attempted to scale the prison's 40-foot wall and were stopped by a rifle shot from a guard tower. After returning fire, they captured three guards and retreated in the prison kitchen where they captured three kitchen employees and 29 inmates. Three other inmates joined in the action.

Bowen and the six others held off the prison's guards, State Police and FBI for 5 days until an agreement was struck.

The standoff ended only after prison officials agreed to several demands: 1) All seven of the men involved in the...
standoff be permitted to transfer, including to Federal prison, if they so
desired; 2) they were not required to
pay for any damages they had caused;
3) any disciplinary time in solitary con-
fine ment be limited to six months.

In the end the men were charged
with assault, attempted escape, kidnap-
ning and other offense. Joe-Joe was
sent to the Federal Prison in Marion,
Illinois, where he met up with other
political prisoners and prisoners of war
such as Sundiata Acoli, Hanif Shabazz
Bey and Ray Luc Levasseur.

Joe-Joe was later transferred back
into the Pennsylvania prison system.
Since his return, he has been kept in
the control units in every prison he has
been transferred to. He currently is
kept in the control unit at the State
Correctional Institution at Coal
Township, with no prospects of ever
being released into general population.

Despite his current condition, his
commitment to the struggle remains
strong. He has raised the conscious-
ness of literally thousands of
Pennsylvania prisoners through his
powerful history and political/military
education classes. Many of these
prisoners become aware of his story
just by arriving at Curran-Fromhold
Correctional Facility, named after the
warden and deputy warden killed in

Despite his name being known in the
Pennsylvania prison system, Joe-Joe
does not have the cause-celeb status of
some of other political prisoners.
Financial support is desperately needed
for Joe-Joe to help with his legal fees.

Free Joe-Joe Bowen

Write to the Joe-Joe Bowen at:

JOSEPH "JOE-JOE" BOWEN
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1 Kelley Drive
Coal Township, PA 17866-1021

Local groups working with Joe-Joe:

Jericho Amnesty Coalition
PO Box 34186
Los Angeles, CA 90034

Anarchist Black Cross Federation
(ABCF)
PO Box 11223
Whittier, CA 90603
e-mail: la@abcf.net

YOU CAN HELP BY GIVING POLITICAL
PRISONERS A VOICE AND VISIBILITY

THE TRUTH CAN SET THEM FREE!