



# The Story of Mrs. Geraldine Robinson

## Martin????? Martin Who???

by Weldon E. Johnstone

Vacant screams and cries shout relentlessly from White America as well as Black from shore to shore. Free Bobby, Free Huey, Free Angela. Persistently the inflamed masses box the deaf eardrums of a racist power structure in protest to the bestiality of the law and its final deliberation concerning the insane fight that Huey Newton, Bobby Seale, and Angela Davis wage against a system who seek to sever the tentacles of resistance from the Blackmans octopus of struggle. Shout on peoples of America because the struggle cannot be waged without leadership. Yes scream on, Free Bobby, Free Angela, Free Martin. Martin? Martin Who?? Martin Sostre of course. But who is he???

Yes, who sings the unsung song of protest for Brother Martin? A revolutionist who has fallen prey to the racist talons of the hungry Eagle. A native of New York State who at one time resided in the city of New York has been deserted. An equally deserving figure in the life and death struggle for Black America has been waging a fight for the liberation of Black people to match second to none and as intense as Bobby, Angela, and Huey. Granted he does not possess the prestigious professionalism of Angela or the flamboyant character dynamics of Huey and Bobby, but can he not be measured in terms of dedication to the struggle instead of materialistic scholarship of society and egotistical charisma? As I traffic the Oswego Campus and relate the general history of Brother Martin I am confronted with the epitome of unconcern and complete ignorance to the fact that if we are looking for someone to free we are able to free someone in our backyard. Let us for the moment drop the memory of Angela etc. to become aware of a man whose existence has the air of futility. If it is not in our power to free him let us give him fortitude to strengthen his spirit so he may be able to carry on his fight against the system. Denied by society, mass media and the people, what would you do?? He chose the path of comittance to secure freedom. What will be your choice.

In coordination with Martin Sostres upcoming trial, January 18, 1972, the staff of Uhuru Sasa has chosen not to be the voice of silence and apathy. In solemn recognition this weeks issue will be dedicated to Brother Martins memory. We will attempt to be for the Oswego campus, the voice of education to tell you about brother Martin, to be the voice of protest and to be the voice of support. In this we hope to accomplish in breaking the strangle hold of ignorance and to enlighten the people to Brother Martin Sostre.

### Introduction

Martin Gonzales Sostre was born in Harlem, N.Y. on March 20, 1923. The years between this date and his long prison term from 1952 to 1964 were not unlike the early years of Malcolm X, Eldridge Cleaver and millions of other oppressed youth of the black colony within America. Survival and temporary escape have been the key words for how many millions of the world's poor under the conditions of abject poverty imposed on them?

While in Attica State Prison, Martin along with many other black prisoners, became aware of a bold new force at work in the grass-roots of American Society. Its first manifestations were in the Muslim newspapers smuggled into the prison, in the whispered suggestions of a Black Brotherhood and the strange but surprisingly sensible attacks on the decadent white society outside the prison walls. Martin was able to fit these ideas together with those he had picked up in Harlem as a youth. He was able to see the power of these ideas and the way they united the vast majority of mankind against infinitesimal few who ruled.

Geraldine Robinson was, until the night of July 14, 1967, an assistant in the Afro-Asian Bookshop. Along with Martin Sostre, she devoted much of her time to selling the literature of the black liberation struggle to the Afro-American community in Buffalo. Today she is Martin Sostre's co-defendant, accused of sale of narcotics and resisting arrest. Mrs. Robinson and her five children are the six other victims in the Buffalo frame-up of the black militant.

Sostre, in a brief written in his pri-

son cell on Mrs. Robinson's behalf, described the police raid on his store; "On July 14, 1967 around midnight and while the defendant (Mrs. Robinson) was in the bookshop, about a dozen white federal, state and city police rushed into the bookshop without announcing their purpose or authority and punched and assaulted defendant and seized her pocketbook, assaulted and blackjacked the owner Martin Sostre when he tried to aid defendant. Three customers present were forced against the wall.

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On his release from prison he came to Buffalo, a mere 35 miles away, and got a job as a steelworker. Once on the streets Martin saw that the youth were ready for action to test and refine the new ideas. And Martin himself listened with growing excitement to the reports of world wide struggles, ever expanding, of the oppressed against the oppressors: Vietnam, the Arab world, Latin America, China, Africa, Cuba. Everywhere, in the middle years of this decade, the poor were rising up.

So Martin, on his earnings as a steelworker, rented a storefront in the heart of the black community of Buffalo and stocked it, as best he could, with writings on this global revolt of the poor against the rich. He called his store the Afro-Asian Bookshop.

To the rich of Buffalo, the store did not go unnoticed. The visits by local and federal cops began almost immediately. After the Buffalo rebellion at the end of June in 1967 the harassment was stepped up. Martin had not been idle during the rebellion. The sale of literature had increased greatly under the influence of "events". To those who could not pay, he lent it and sometimes gave it away. He kept the store open all night and spoke to crowds, using pictures from magazines and the white-cops, running hog-wild in the streets outside, to illustrate his points about white colonialism and the need for black self-determination and socialism.

Several days after the rebellion subsided, as an answer to his activities, the cops smashed the front windows of the store and firemen hosed down the inside of the store, destroying most of the offending literature. When Martin turned this attack to his advantage by plastering political wall posters on the boarded-up windows, the cops tried to rip them down. The long black Cadillacs of city officials passed, slowing to a crawl as they passed the store. Martin informed several friends that the store was under surveillance from a window across the street.

The final attack came on the evening of July 14th. Several car-loads of non-uniformed white cops stormed the shop, arrested Geraldine Robinson, Martin Sostre, and three young men in the store at the time.



MARTIN SOSTRE

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"The defendant, who never in her life has been involved in any criminal activity or arrested for a crime or violation of law, was charged with sale of narcotics and resisting arrest. The owner of the bookshop was charged with sale of narcotics, inciting the riot of two weeks earlier, arson and assault. The three customers present were charged with narcotics offenses; and the Afro-Asian Bookshop was sacked and totally destroyed by the white police agents of the racist power structure."

Mrs. Robinson was only able to win her release on \$5,000 bail when friends and relatives put up the collateral. However, she has been subjected to the same kind of cruel harassment which Martin Sostre suffered in jail. In addition to being hounded by the courts, this fall, welfare authorities in Buffalo filed papers to have Mrs. Robinson's five children taken away from her on the pretext that she is "responsible for their neglect." Among other things, the welfare worker blamed Mrs. Robinson for not having proper food in the house on the day after her welfare check was supposed to arrive, but didn't; blamed her for not painting her flat, but did not provide the money to do so; blamed her for keeping the children home on the first day of school, because they needed clothes and she was waiting for the same welfare check to pay for the clothes.

The welfare worker, who admitted that he did not have one witness to substantiate the charge that Mrs. Robinson neglected her children, insidiously added to the list of charges the implication that she was involved in drug pushing:

"Mrs. Robinson is presently under indictment as part of the Sostre case of 1967, for frequenting a place where narcotics are sold, and resisting arrest." (Mrs. Robinson has not yet been tried, and is therefore, even according to bourgeois law, supposed to be assumed innocent until proven otherwise.)

But in the eyes of Buffalo authorities, she is guilty -- guilty of being a fighter for black liberation. So the harassment goes on. Other forms of petty harassment, such as holding up her food stamps, have also been used in an attempt to break her spirit and will to defend her cause.

Mrs. Robinson's court appearances were filled with the same kind of vicious, racist treatment. On December 18, 1967, Judge Marshall, the same judge who sentenced her co-defendant to 31 to 41 years and showed his bias throughout Sostre's trial, asked Mrs. Robinson if she had ever been in a mental institution. He did so after she had decided to defend herself and not take a court-appointed lawyer. (Marshall actually did have Martin Sostre sent to Meyer Memorial hospital for psychiatric observation when he, too, insisted on acting as his own attorney.)

In February, the D.A. handling the Sostre-Robinson case made a motion to separate the cases. On February 19,

1968, Martin Sostre appeared in court before Judge Colucci to challenge the D. A.'s motion, arguing that the D.A. had no grounds for severance of the two cases. Sostre argued that the courts were attempting to divide the two defendants from one another in order to apply pressure on them separately. In spite of the defendant's arguments, the cases were severed.

Nevertheless, Martin Sostre himself has continued to work on Mrs. Robinson's case, and recently he wrote a brief on her behalf asking that her trial be moved from Erie County on the grounds that she cannot receive a fair trial there.

Mr. Sostre's arguments cite the fact that her case is still referred to as the "Riot Case" because of the barrage of prejudicial propaganda released to the press by Police Commissioner Felicetta just after her arrest.

Felicetta publicly linked Mrs. Robinson to a "small band of Black Power fanatics" responsible for the June rebellion. He stated that "substantial evidence of equipment for arson and riot incitement" was found in Martin Sostre's home; that Martin Sostre trained "youthful arson squads" and made \$10,000 a week pushing heroin. All these prejudicial statements, for which not one single solitary scintilla of evidence has been presented, make it impossible for Mrs. Robinson to get a fair trial in Erie County.

Sostre also cited the obvious bias of the courts against his own case and the de facto white racism existing in Erie County which make a fair trial by an impartial judge and jury impossible.

After being without a lawyer for over a year, Mrs. Robinson is now represented by Attorney Charles McKinney of New York City, whom the Martin Sostre Defense Committee obtained through the aid of the NAACP. The Sostre Defense Committee, which has raised all the funds for legal fees and publicity for Sostre's case, is equally dedicated to the defense of Mrs. Robinson and has declared that it is determined to continue to battle until both Martin Sostre and Geraldine Robinson are free.

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--a man who could not have sold heroin, since by that act he would have gone against everything he believed in.

Vincent Copeland grew up in Buffalo and worked in the Lackawanna steel plant where Sostre later worked. He has contributed articles to various radical journals. This is his first published book.

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Mrs. Robinson And Her Five Children

Franklin, from seeing him for several weeks. In addition, a 40-page handwritten brief which he had laboriously worked on to send to his attorney was confiscated by Warden Harold W. Follette (see accompanying article).

"The real reason for the obstruction of the legal document," wrote Sostre, "is to conceal ... the vicious Nazi-like tactics employed by the racist political power structure of New York State through its police, judicial and correction departments to frame-up, legally lynch and put in prison any persons who actively oppose their policy of black repression at home and militarism in Vietnam."

**THE AFRO-ASIAN BOOKSHOP**

And in Buffalo, New York, Martin Sostre did "actively oppose" repression and militarism when he opened the Afro-Asian Bookshop in the heart of the city's black community. This bookstore was, in Mr. Sostre's words, "the only outlet in Buffalo for books and periodicals on African and Afro-American history, culture and the struggles for liberation of the oppressed Afro-American and Asian peoples." Soon Sostre's shop became not merely a bookstore, but a gathering place for black youths to talk and learn about their own history and heroes and the heroes of the Vietnamese liberation struggle.

All this did not go unnoticed by the Buffalo police.

Several months after Sostre had opened the bookstore, two city detectives visited the shop and threateningly told him, "Nice place you got here, Marty. You're doing alright for yourself since you got out of prison. What are you doing now behind this bookstore front?" When Sostre objected, he was told, "OK, Marty, have it your way."

Martin Sostre, who grew up in Harlem, had been imprisoned on a narcotics charge as a youth and spent 12 years in Attica Prison near Buffalo. His prison experience was like that of Malcolm X and Eldridge Cleaver. While there, he became a revolutionary Nationalist, deeply committed to the black liberation struggle. In prison he also studied law, and it was Sostre who waged the legal struggle which resulted in a court ruling that for the first time gave Muslims the right to hold religious services in prison.

**THE JUNE REBELLION**

Despite the threats, Martin Sostre kept his store open for two years. He gave up a good job at Bethlehem Steel to keep the bookstore open 15 hours a day, seven days a week. In this way he eked out a living until a rebellion in the black community rocked all of Buffalo at the end of June, 1967.

"During the three nights of revolt," wrote Sostre in a letter from Erie County Jail, "when all the shops in my area -- both black - and white-owned -- closed early, I stayed open until 3 a.m., thereby providing a refuge (from the tear gas being indiscriminately sprayed into the streets by the police) for many passers-by and freedom fighters. The shop stayed packed and the cops outside didn't like it, but there was nothing they could do." Sostre talked to the black people in his store about the police brutality and showed them books like Robert F. Williams' "Negroes with Guns" and works by Malcolm X.

The police response to Sostre's activities was to call in firemen who, under the pretext of putting out a fire next door, turned their hoses on the bookstore, smashing the windows and shelves and destroying most of the literature.

Sostre fought back by boarding up the windows and pasting up articles and photos of the revolt and anti-Vietnam war articles. By adopting the techniques of the Chinese Red Guard wall posters, Sostre's store was again attracting much attention in the black community. Sostre was also just about to launch a newspaper for the black community, the Afro Freedom Fighter. He had bought a second-hand mimeo machine and had gotten together a staff of militant black youths to be writers and reporters, when the police crack down came.

**SOSTRE ARRESTED, LIBERATION BOOKSHOP SACKED**

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