

By MONICA MOOREHEAD
GOOCHLAND, Va.—"I'm 28, a Black woman, mother, Muslim, revolutionary, and prisoner of America's genocidal war against people of color."

That's how Sister Safiya Asya Bukhari (Bernice Jones) described herself in an interview with *Workers World* from Goochland prison.

The fire of the Black liberation struggle of the '60s rages in the spirit of Safiya Bukhari today. Outside the walls she fought ceaselessly for the freedom of Black people and for the countless prisoners of poverty held in America's jails. She has not stopped fighting the racist and unjust system that today holds her too a prisoner.

On Oct. 10, an important civil suit launched by Bukhari, against the prison system, will begin. This suit, exposing the condition of women in prison, is based on Bukhari's own experience as a woman who was forced to break for freedom from Goochland in 1976 in order to seek medical treatment she was denied behind bars.

A HISTORY OF STRUGGLE

During the 60s, Bukhari worked actively as a Black Panther Party (BPP) member. "I taught in the Liberation Schools, organized welfare mothers, tenants around indecent housing, drug addicts; and through working with them I learned the true extent of the problem and came to know what must be done" she said.

A tireless organizer, Bukhari put much work into aiding women and men trapped in the prison system. She was an organizer of the National Committee for the Defense of Political Prisoners and, "during this period I also worked with the Women's Bail Fund and the New York 4 (later 5) Defense Committee. Later in my capacity as Communications Secretary/Information Officer for the East Coast Party, I was also editor of the Party's newspaper, *Right On!* Black Community News Service."

Bukhari explained that it was this political work and high visibility that made her "a target for police harassment and surveillance."

On Dec. 28, 1973, she and three men were arrested on suspicion of attempting to free six Black Liberation Army (BLA) members from the Tombs prison in Manhattan. The bogus charges were later dropped for lack of a shred of evidence. "The harassment didn't stop there, however," she pointed out.

"On April 17, 1974, the Tombs was attacked in an unsuccessful attempt to liberate BLA members," she explained. "That night my apartment at 53 St. Nicholas Ave. in Harlem was raided. Two weeks later, while I was attending the trial of the N.Y. 5, I was served a subpoena to appear before a Grand Jury investigating the BLA. Rather than appear, I elected to go underground."

On the night of Jan. 25, 1975, Bukhari and three other members of the Amistad Collective of the BLA stopped at a store for coldcuts. Bukhari described the nightmare that followed: "While I was at the meat counter I happened to glance up and notice two of the brothers coming into the store. . . . out of the side of my eye I noticed what I later found

POLITICAL PRISONERS

Workers World interview with

Safiya Asya Bukhari

out to be the manager pointing a shotgun at the brothers. Then shots rang out all around."

Bukhari and Masai Eehosi (William Gibson) were captured and Kombosi Amistad (Alfred Butler) was "stomped to death by the manager of the store while he was lying on the floor shot."

"Within five minutes after the shootout ended," Bukhari stated, "the FBI was on the scene, and the next morning they held a news conference announcing my capture. Bail was set at \$1 million dollars cash on each charge. I had five."

At the opening of the trial, Bukhari was appointed a lawyer who she explained had worked for the FBI for five years and previously worked for the CIA. When she protested and informed the court she would represent herself in the trial, "I was removed from the courtroom. The trial was over at 8 o'clock that night—and we were sentenced to 40 years." Brother Eehosi is serving his sentence in the Powhatan Correctional Center.

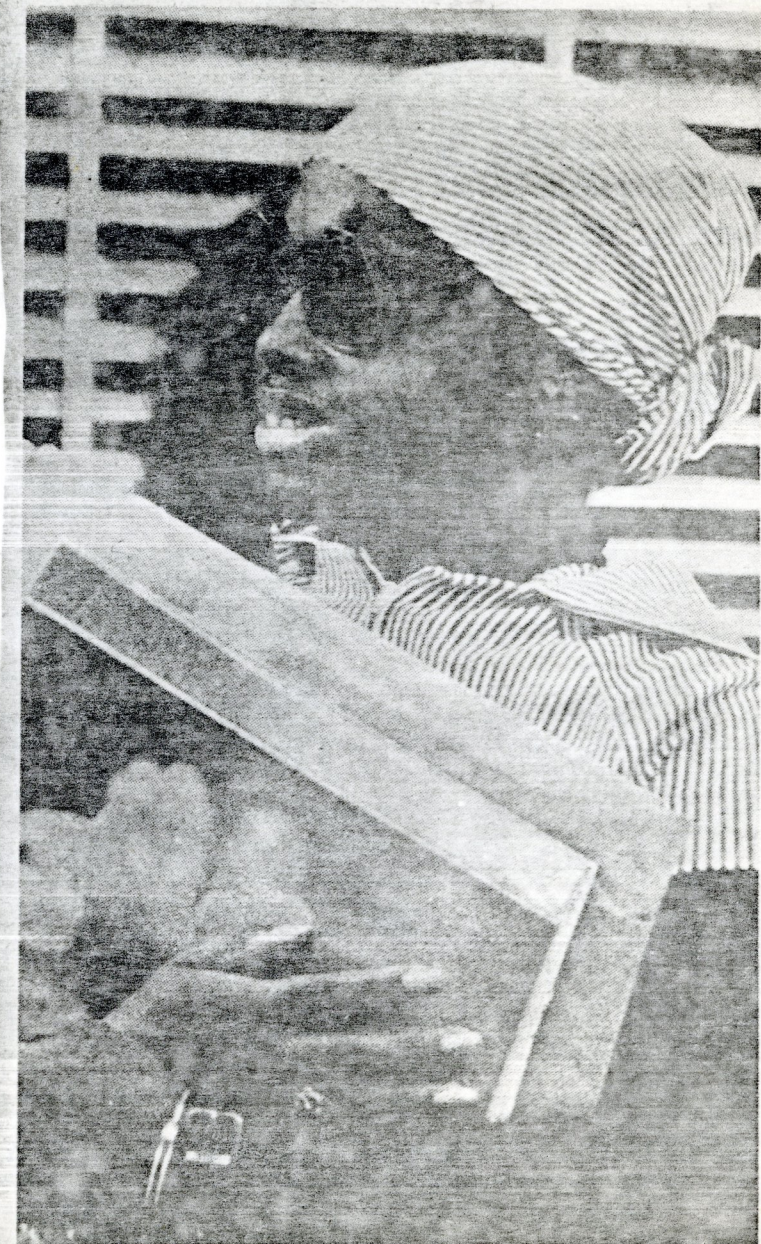
PLIGHT OF WOMEN PRISONERS

Bukhari told *Workers World*, "The biggest problem that affects the female prison population is a lack of a working knowledge of their rights and how to secure or

protect them." She explained that that translates into a lack of adequate medical care, educational and recreational programs, unchecked physical and mental brutality, and denial of legal and civil rights.

On Dec. 31, 1976, Bukhari took her freedom from the Goochland women's prison to secure medical attention outside the walls. She had been suffering from fibroid tumors on her ovaries—a source of great pain and constant hemorrhaging. After long ignoring her pain, prison officials finally allowed her to see a doctor who was so racist he told her to come back and see him in 10 years! After her flight to freedom, Sister Bukhari was just about to enter a hospital for medical treatment when she was recaptured in Poughkeepsie, N.Y., on Feb. 21.

At her trial for escape charges she received a minimum one year added to her sentence. Bukhari turned the tables and put the state on trial for inadequate medical care for prisoners. She stated she would prove that it was morally and humanly her right to seek adequate medical care by any means necessary. Bukhari summed up eloquently at the trial, "Women who have been confined don't cease to be human and don't deserve to be caged like animals."



Safiya Asya Bukhari: a Black woman, mother, Muslim, revolutionary, and a prisoner of war. WW photo