

To: News Editors
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From: August 8th Brigade Defense Committee

For: Immediate Release

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New York - On Monday, May 21, the trial of August 8th Brigade member, Felix Castro, will enter its fourth week in Kingston, New York. Prosecutor Michael Kavanagh rested his case on Wednesday, May 16, after calling only seven witnesses. Castro, charged with first degree rioting, attempted coercion, and unlawful imprisonment, faces a minimum of 7-15 years in prison and possibly life, if convicted.

(The August 8th Brigade is a group of prisoners being tried on felony charges stemming from the August 8, 1977 takeover of the Eastern New York Correctional Facility at Napanoch, New York by over 200 prisoners. The prisoners were protesting vicious Ku Klux Klan terror and KKK organizing among guards inside the prison. One of the prisoners' key demands was the immediate firing of two known KKK guards, Sergeants Budd and Sluka. The rebellion erupted after four years of writing suits and filing petitions against Ku Klux Klan guard brutality without any action being taken by the Department of Corrections to resolve the prisoners' complaints. Other members of the Brigade include Andre Nieves, Lorenzo Perez, Frank Abney, Ronald Tacardon, and Eddie Pacheco.)

Immediately following the completion of the prosecution's case, Defense Attorney Doug Colbert demanded that all charges against Castro be dismissed due to the failure of the state to produce any credible testimony substantiating the charges against the defendant. The prosecution's witnesses, all of whom were employees of the New York Department of Corrections, included Superintendent Jack Czarnetzky and Deputy Warden Davis from the Eastern New York Correctional Facility. Without explanation, the presiding judge, John Clynne, denied the motion and ordered the defense to produce its first witness, disregarding the objections of Defense Attorney Colbert.

Colbert's objections centered on the fact that the Department of Corrections has been extremely uncooperative in delivering witness subpoenaed by the defense to Kingston. As of May 16, the defense had only been able to interview nine of the 48 witnesses scheduled to testify. Most of the defense witnesses are incarcerated in the New York prison system. However, one witness, Leroy Miles, was called to the stand to testify for the defense.

Miles, who was the chairman of the Liason Committee during the August 8th rebellion, described the negotiations between the prisoners' representatives and the administration over the demands of the rebellion. During his testimony, he described the role Castro played as being one of maintaining order among the prisoners and protecting the hostages taken in the course of the takeover. Under extremely hostile cross-examination by the prosecutor, Miles repeatedly stressed the fact that Castro had been key in the release of the hostages, unharmed.