LETTERS

FOOD CONDITIONS AT PELICAN BAY

Dear Prison Focus:

I write this missive in regard to your request concerning the food conditions here at the Pelican Bay SHU.

First let me speak for myself; thank you for your continued interest and empathy into the lives of prisoners, for your sacrifice of time, money, heart, and mind to seek justice by volunteering to help our plight.

It is my personal contention the current food dilemma here at Pelican Bay SHU is a hotbed for cultivating bacteria causing 1) food poisoning, 2) helicobacter pylori (or h. pylori), 3)salmonella poisoning, 4) staphylococcus poisoning, and 5) Hepatitis A+B and possibly C.

Food poisoning poses a specific danger for older individuals and for anyone with a compromised immune system and can cause death if not treated. Food poisoning also has many different symptoms—including fever, chills, heartburn, severe cramping, vomiting, frequent diarrhea, nausea, abdominal pain, and loss of appetite. (Most of these cause dehydration, so drink a lot of water, if you think you are affected).

I arrived here at Pelican Bay State Prison SHU in December 1999 and since then I’ve had H. Pylori and food poisoning. Both of these so-called bacterial contaminates come from lack of sanitation and from not preparing food correctly, or from rotten foods. (Importantly, always wash your hands before touching food—this is imperative.) With the food poisoning I’ve had, I experienced six to seven days and nights of hell, I went through diarrhea and flu-like symptoms.

With H. Pylori, which has pretty much all the same type of symptoms, it seems to start off a little slower. It’s a bacterium that if not treated with three different kinds of medications at once can cause ulcers and lots of heartburn. The medication is taken for two weeks.

I am no expert, but the cause of these different types of bacterial food poisoning contaminates does not rest on the shoulders of any prisoner. It is the fault of management and staff if standard protocols are not followed in preparing food correctly, for not cooking the food at the correct temperatures, and not at the right length of time to kill the bacteria. Second, inadequate refrigeration temperatures may be of issue. Third, it seems there may be poor hygiene and poor sanitary environmental conditions in the SHU kitchen. The blame falls at the feet of those in an authority position who delegate to others. It is his or her responsibility not to serve spoiled foods, or let those with open cuts and sores work around food, and to keep hygiene a priority in all areas of the kitchen.

It is my opinion that all or most of the illnesses from food contaminates can be stopped if CDCR is accountable for its kitchens and food staff, including delivery of trays. Second, more orientation for workers on kitchen practices is needed. Then—and only then—will conditions in the SHU kitchen start to change.

It is also a huge problem that the serving trays we receive are full of graffiti on them, which help hold and keep bacteria alive in the cracks and scarred cuts in the trays. It doesn’t help matters that when the food is served it is swimming around in the water. It is hard to even eat the food, it is so disrespectful looking.

Finally, the quality and quantity of food is sketchy here at Pelican Bay State Prison SHU: it is cold and waterlogged, and small in portion.

I do hope this article can bring improvement consistency to the food service program here at Pelican Bay State Prison SHU.

—Michael David Russell, Pelican Bay SHU

ORGANIZE FOR CHANGE

Dear Prison Focus:

I write this letter with a very heavy heart. Why? Well after reading Ed’s comments (PF28 Summer 2007) I was dumbfounded by statements he made. I have been a supporter and fan of California Prison Focus and respect its work and goals. I have had the pleasure of corresponding with several members and volunteers. But lately it seems that I have had to be a defender of some of its views, and allowed submissions. Like debriefing and sensitive needs yards etc. that were topics in issues passed, then, like now I believe there is “no” place for such in Prison Focus as it totally goes against the premise in which CPF was built.

Once again I find myself having to write with the latest attack coming straight from the editor with his comments about “no struggle in California because of alleged shot callers have more in common with their captors whose interest they serve etc” then Ed ended with a proverb about “truth.”

Well Ed, let me be truthful and please correct me if I am wrong. The truth is that you have no idea about how the inside of the California prisons operate, nor its culture because you have not been in it. Sadly, from the sound of it you use language and take ideas from the CCPOA and the CDCR’S debrief handbooks. Maybe CPF has lost its focus?

Now I am sure you get frustrated, but do not be so ignorant, the struggle is alive and continuing! As you may be aware, PBSP has created an isolate program in the SHU called “short corridor program” (isolation within isolation) which is an underground program (no doubt) where IGI has hand picked individuals for placement into this isolation within isolation, of course jailhouse lawyers were targeted. Well to make my point, I have filed an action in the Del Norte Superior Court which was accepted as a Habeas Corpus (case no. CVPT 07-1453) and need to gather declarations in support. Well let me tell you that I had no problem doing this and gaining support, ideas, and encouragement from convicts of all races. It has only been through mutual cooperation that I have been able to proceed with this legal action against the short corridor program, in which the court has ordered an informal response and reply, both of which have been filed and are now before the court.

So you see, your comments are unfounded and hinge on the very propaganda that is manufactured by the system, and those too weak to right it are broken and conformed to it. You not only disrespect the majority of the prison population with your comments, but you disrespect CPF and those who founded CPF and the principles they built it on. Of course, I’m just a fool, what do I know? Well I know this much which has proven true on numerous occasions “Just because you can’t see something doesn’t mean its not there” (old proverb from mom).

On another topic requiring all of our attention and energy, there is an initiative now being circulated for the November 2008 ballot called “California Prison Population Reduction Act of 2008” being...
Prison Focus is a publication of California Prison Focus, a nonprofit organization that works with and on behalf of prisoners in California’s control units and other institutions.

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IMPORTANT NOTICE

Inside and outside readers, please send us a note to confirm your address or your subscription will have to be cut off. We are not trying to prevent anyone from getting the newsletter, rather, we are trying to avoid spending money on printing and mailing newsletters that end up in the trash because someone has been transferred or released. Subscriptions for prisoners are for one year for a donation of $5.00 or more. This can be in stamps.

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ESSAYS ON SOCIETY AND PRISONS

Welcome to Prison Focus No. 30. We hope everyone out there is doing the best they can, and striving to do better. In this section of prisoner writing you will find a variety of essays on issues of concern such as living with prisoners who have mental health issues, brutality against prisoners, women’s oppression, and more. You should read with interest the essay on colonialism by Antonio A. Velasquez. We also feature a reprinted interview with Mumia Abu-Jamal and a piece written by former political prisoner Assata Shakur on the prison industrial complex. Tell us what you think. This is your newsletter.

—Leslie DiBenedetto, Co-editor

DANGEROUS CELLMATE

By Dortell Williams

Chops has gone nuts. On any day you can hear him yelling and screaming unintelligibly. In fact, at all times of the day you can hear him yelling and screaming from his cell. He makes loud, primitive, guttural sounds; like a wild man, especially on lockdowns when he can’t get out of his cell. He shares an extremely small cell with another man, an incredibly patient man.

There’s another prisoner who stands in the shower, says a fella I’ll call Jack DeWalt. “He hits and beats on himself until he draws blood.” DeWalt told an officer, who apathetically sent him to another officer, who, in turn, sent him to another officer. “They really don’t care,” says DeWalt. “It really hurt me to see that man doing that to himself.” Mental illness and inadequate medical care are pervasive throughout the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation. Prior to taking charge of the medical wing of prison system last year, now former federal receiver Robert Sillen found that an average of one prisoner per month was needlessly dying due to neglect.

In July 2007 the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals appointed a three-judge panel to also intervene in the custody department. A dramatic move, no doubt, after over a decade of unfulfilled court orders and nudges to reduce the population. We’re talking about a $9 billion debacle, with 172,000 prisoners crammed and stuffed in the space designed for half that. In his order confirming the intervention, Justice Thelton Henderson, of the Northern District Court, said: “The court has given the department every reasonable opportunity to bring its prison medical system up to constitutional standards, and it is beyond dispute that the state has failed.”

The incarcerated mentally ill aren’t just a danger to themselves, but also to the many others imprisoned with them. To make matters worse, prison officials have no qualms about mixing them with the general population—even to the detriment of themselves. Just the other day one of the brothers I attend church with shared a rather disquieting, but not-so-surprising story about a really disturbed man he was forced to share his cell with.

My brother Sean, we’ll call him, had come in early from the yard one day while dayroom was open inside the housing unit. His cell partner, Craig, which sounds like a good name to call him, walked about, looking nervous and stranger than usual. Sean noticed the oddity but simply set his suspicions on the back shelf of his mind.

Moments later Craig attacked a guard. Of course, that was cause to suspend the program for the night. When Sean returned to his cell he noticed that his personal property had been rifled through. He also noticed that all of his candy and been eaten: wrappers all over the place. And Craig’s personal belongings were neatly packed in bags, ready to go. It was apparently all planned.

As if that weren’t enough, Craig had poured water in Sean’s TV.

Later Sean learned that Craig had a history of turning on his cell partners, accusing them of stealing from him. He would attack them out of the blue and destroy their personal property.

Not long after, Craig was released from the hole. Of course, he wasn’t liable for his actions because, well, he’s mentally ill. Unfortunately such immunity isn’t available for those he’s housed with. Craig was eventually assigned to share a cell with a fella we call Bam.

Bam wasn’t warned of Craig’s violent proclivities. Within just a few weeks Craig was accusing him of messin’ in his stuff, and other outlandish accusations. Craig eventually attacked Bam, swinging violently at him. Of course, Bam defended himself.

While prison officials may not care, the feds apparently have had enough. Never have I seen the so-called criminal element so eager for the feds to come.

♦

IMPUNITY: THE REAL CRIME

By Curtis Sanders

Such things as corporal punishment, police brutality, and terror tactics are illegal, immoral, and unconstitutional. However, such activities are very much alive today and often practiced, especially in SHU and Ad-Seg environments.

These activities are carried out by mean and vindictive individuals, and usually with little more justification than that you are a prisoner in their presence and they happen to be having a bad day.

And though only a small percentage of correctional officers have such a mentality and such practices are not embraced by the whole, it does quite often still happen, and very rarely will other officers or staff speak out against it.

From outright beatings, to orchestrating killings or stabbings, when such incidents happen, it is all too often covered up or sugar-coated by misleading or false documentation in an effort to protect and shield the wrong-doing of the staff involved.

The lack of outside oversight or even the simplest form of accountability for such officers is a very frightening thought; it allows them to act in virtual immunity, regardless of their actions, not having to worry about consequences as long as there is no damaging documentation.

But as the above describes the extreme, there is also another form of brutality that an even larger percentage of officers practice, such as planting weapons or other items in your cell, or using false information in an attempt to validate you as a gang member, or perhaps just being vindictive and pouring water into your television.

For example, in 2004 I was a level I prisoner (minimum security) at Pelican Bay and filed a staff complaint on a lieutenant for racial prejudice and using derogatory language. I was then told I would spend the rest of my time in the SHU. Sure enough,
the Pelican Bay security squad practiced Gestapo tactics on me and gave me a SHU term for conspiracy to commit battery, based solely upon confidential information. It was all bogus and that SHU term lasted a lot longer than it should have. But that is just a minor example compared to what happens all too often.

But still I believe that the true injustice is there is practically zero public awareness of such accounts and therefore very little pressure on the Department of Corrections to correct such wrongs.

FREE THE WIMYN!

By Comrade Spider

Before there were gods, there was the Goddess. Before Zeus, Horus, and Yahweh, there was the Great Mother. The feminine conceptualization of deity was a reflection of a time when lineage was reckoned according to the wimyn (as opposed to the man), and wimyn as a whole were greatly revered as the source of life and being. In short, fertility was the all-important aspect of these economically simple times, most prominently displayed in wimyn giving birth, and therefore the power of fertility was personified in the Great Mother.

However, as the man’s role in the economic production of society increased, so the deity (or deities) began to take on more masculine forms. And as the man began to express his now-found prominence in more dominant ways, so did the deity begin to morph from a life-giver or an incarceration of nature to an overlord and tyrant. The same gods that were created by the male would end up instituting male dominated priesthods and codes of law that divinely sanctioned lordship of the male over the female. As the economic production and exchange in society became increasingly more complex, syncretistic, and contradictory, this symbiotic relationship between male and his god followed suit, and the nature of the deity became more paradoxical and unfortunately oppressive.

Almost nowhere is the materialist conception of history given such credence than in the parallel between a society’s economic relations and its idea of god. But more concrete than issues of change in religious dogma is the way that wimyn have suffered since the establishment of patriarchy as the norm in male-female relations. The role of wimyn in society has undergone its various transformations as the mode of human production has evolved to present-day imperialist capitalism, with every-increasing subtle subjection and oppression as the theme that runs through every societal change. As the capitalist system compels the bourgeoisie to exploit the proletariat if such as system is to exist, and as the system of slavery by its very nature necessitates the exploitation of the slave by the slave master, so the current socioeconomic system of oppression profits by reinforcing the concept that the wimyn is to remain subordinate to the rule of the man.

Wimyn make up about 51 percent of the United States population. And a great number of those are to this day living in some form of repression, whether they realize it or not—51 percent of a country’s population that has to deal not only with the crushing weight of capitalist exploitation, but also the weight of gender oppression.

And all of this in spite of suffrage. Yet, does the right to vote signify that liberation has come? Did New Afrikan suffrage liberate New Afrikans? The first major wave of the wimyn’s liberation movement took place in the 1800s mainly as a response to the great economic and political changes brought about by the industrial revolution, a very significant parallel with the proletarian rebellions of that time. Wimyn’s liberation peaked in the 1920s, and then declined after the primary goal of suffrage had been reached. The second wave occurred in the 1960s, when political and social changes were dramatically taking place all over the world. This second wave sought a greater equality for wimyn in the family, the work place, and political life.

However, while some concessions have been gained, wimyn are far from liberated. Concessions quickly turn from stepping-stones toward final liberation into a compromise made with the slave-master, a pacifier. Concessions, like religion, can be the opium of the masses, and, reform can be one of the greatest weapons against revolution. And just as colonies of empires can be politically independent yet held in economic bondage — so can voting wimyn still be politically free (i.e., able to vote, hold public office, etc.), yet economically and psychologically held under the sway of the male gender.

To put it blatantly, wimyn are still considered as the man’s slave. Suffrage has not effected liberation, for the capitalist system in which these votes are cast gorges itself on all kinds of oppression and exploitation, and cannot be voted into ceasing this rapacious trend. Consider the television commercials that are forced down our throats and into our minds. Of all the advertisements for all the things that have to do with the household, when have you ever seen a man doing the mopping, buying the groceries, feeding the children? It is always the womyn doing these things, reinforcing the idea that a womyn’s place is in the home, acting out her divinely sanctioned role as the man’s servant, accessory, or slave.

Furthermore, it is still taken for granted that the womyn who marries will change her name to the man’s name. Hell, it is still taken for granted that marriage, with all of its political, economic, and religious intrusions, is that accepted route to be taken and that those who do not marry are not actually committed, and any children born are damned by that disparaging adverbial phrase “out of wedlock.”

Again, wimyn have yet to be liberated. Reforms and concessions may make some positive changes, but if the underlying socioeconomic system remains intact liberation is not total. Wimyn need revolution just as badly as oppressed nationalities. For wimyn to truly be liberated a revolutionary change must take place to sweep away the exploitative order and restructure society from the bottom up according to truly human values instead of financial gain. Wimyn will not be liberated by allowing their movement to be placed on the back burner in the freedom struggles, or by passively expecting liberation to be granted automatically when revolution comes. Wimyn must consciously link their freedom struggle to the greater proletarian international struggle to abolish capitalist imperialism. Feminine capitalism will not benefit wimyn any more than Black capitalism benefits Blacks.

Not only do wimyn need revolution, but the revolution needs wimyn. As we seek to embody, even in the headquarters of global capitalist imperialism, the future socialist society we need wimyn in our ranks equally as great, if not greater, than we need men. A male dominated revolutionary movement can be just as patriarchal as capitalism, and the result will be a pseudo-socialist society that continues to hold onto male privilege, just as white privilege will be retained if nationalism is not held in its proper significance.

But an isolated feminist movement can be just as reactionary as reverse racism. Wimyn must be their own liberators; however, that can only truly happen if their
struggle is kept in the right perspective, within the broader focus of ending capit- 

talistic exploitation of humanity, viewing 

every specific liberation as a microcosm 

of the whole. We need wimyn in our ranks, 

creating revolutionary programs that serve 

to liberate themselves and at the same time 

promote the liberation of the international 

proletariat as a whole. Wimyn, we need 

you! Rise up and thrown off the millennia-

ded yoke of male domination; demand your 

liberation and your equality.%

For info concerning the New Afrikan 

Black Panther Party (NABPP), the White 

Panther Organization (WPO), the Read 

Heart Warrior Society (RHWS), and the 

New Afrikan Service Organization (NASO), 

write the following address: 

PO Box 4362, Allentown, PA 18105.

ON A COLLISION 

COURSE

By Antonio A. Velásquez

I am an associate, of many things — 

groups, actions, and ideas that mostly 

go against the grain of what passes as 

the mainstream, for many obvious reasons. 

I should mention also that I associate with 

known so-called Raza gang members. So, 

on its surface I guess this would make me 

a likely candidate for the many penalty 

enhancements that tack on years to any 

insignificant infractions like spitting on the 

sidewalk, solely for being identified or as-

sociated with the term gang.

Now there is something seriously wrong 

here. We are trying to adapt but are having 

a damn hard time doing so. You see, many 

of us grew up being taught by teachers and 

parents alike — well, not parents, and come 

to think of it, not too many teachers — that 

it was wrong to accuse anyone of anything 

simply due to a proximity to the guilty -

guilt by association, they called it.

The assumption was, of course, that there 

was a process of jurisprudence to establish 

guilt beyond any doubt by the accuser pro- 

ducing evidences to back up an accusation. 

One could not be convicted and punished 

by what might seem to be the truth. Unfor-

tunately, things have changed.

It should not surprise anyone then when 

in the name of fighting terrorism, a country 

that has eliminated the cornerstones of its 

own constitution—that tortures overseas, 

indiscriminately bombs innocents, illegally 

spies, and disappears its own citizens with- 

out the right of Habeas Corpus¹—that chil-

dren here are tried as adults, and that adults 

are thrown into torture cells as if they were 

prisoners of war. That is only part of the 

story.

What is hidden behind the story is that the 

thief can no longer hide a theft that has got-

ten out of control on so many levels. Both 

real (property, products and production) and 

illuminary (created by speculation) capitals 

have converged to the point that one can no 

longer prop up the other. We see it clearly 

in recent history with the savings and loan 

debacle, Enron, the Dot.com bust, and now 

the sub-prime loan scandal. In some cases, 

the results of real labor were entrusted to 

institutions and exchanged for little useless 

pieces of paper with equivalent numbers 

representing the real investment of time 

laboring for salary. In others, people were 

lured into signing equally useless pieces of 

paper obligating them to pay an amount in-

flated by the frenzy of speculation fueled 

by get-rich quick greed and a manipulated 

false sense of self-sufficiency. In this last 

instance, simply transferring a little ink as 

signature onto the paper obligated them to 

an inflated amount that no longer matched 

the real collateral value, subsequently de-

pressed, some would say deviously, back to 

a previous lower value.

In both instances, the thieves win as they 

cash out at inflated values and transfer their 

conversion to more secure investments; 

they acquire real property at cut rate prices 

leaving the duped so-called investors with 

the inflated bill to pay, again with real la-

1. “Habeas protects against the exer-

cutive taking a person and locking them up 

without a chance to prove their innocence. 

Habeas is what stands between us and a 

system of secret detentions, a police state.” 

- Jonathan Hafetz, Director of Litigation at 

the Liberty and National Security Project 

of the Brennan Center for Justice at New 

York University School of Law.

bor. Like a pyramid scheme, to slow the 

inevitable death of this illusionary money 

while suckering more people, real property 

must exchange hands. In the end, all but the 

top gets hurt. Transfer, then by force, ma-

nipulation, or consent is the key. In fact, it 

is very simple: inquisitions, genocide, and 

wars of any kind are not waged for reasons 

of idea conflict, they are simply waged by 

imperial² powers for the forced transfer of 

property and the elimination of existing 

control.

This country is on a collision course with 

history. It is inevitable as liberty, justice and 

equality does not mix with profit no matter 

how it is attempted to be justified with the 

promise of so-called equal opportunity. By 

this country associating its founding con-

cepts with usurers,³ it has allowed these 

parasites to swindle it into a dead-end street 

where the only salvation is to continue in-

vading, killing and plundering resources 

from land populated by people that look 

like Raza. This country is so indebted to 

these criminals that the only other option 

is to foreclose the country to them. Do not 

think it is a joke when the media reports on 

government statistics that indicate that the 

Iraq war, for instance, will cost every man 

woman and child in the U.S. over $20,000.

2. A country having control or sovereignty 

over other countries or colonies. Imperial 

powers are not defeated by the external 

foes but implode like termite-ridden foun-

dations. Termites once destroying a foun-

dation will move on to the next house. We 

see this happening now in the transfer of 

the economy overseas. When the balance 

is tipped the bankers will follow and turn off 

the lights on the way out.

3. The lending of money at high criminal 

interests rates. Notice the interest paid ev-

every month on your credit cards, bank loans, 

or mortgages and find out just how much 

you pay these criminals. The trap is keeping 

one paying minimum payments so that one 

is paying forever on the original amount. 

Usurers are not producers but live off those 

that do. They are like the pack of hyenas 

feeding off the dumb wildebeests - us. This 

term applies to more than money. We have 

political usurers too that trap Raza into 

doing their bidding on penalty of disgrace 

— just check out what is happening to As-

sembly leader Fabian Núñez with his party-

ing on campaign contributions. He has just 

been given a taste of what could happen to 

his overly- speculated future. Identify who 

handles him and one gets a step closer to 

exposing the hidden enemy.
It will be paid.

When we the slaves cannot, or will not pay, the country must bend over for the debt collector, figuratively speaking. Unless of course, it revolts, storms their Bastille and rolls some heads. But, you will ask, what the hell does it have to do with the homies on the corner? Patience, patience, read on.

**AND WE THINK THE WALLS ARE TO KEEP US OUT**

Currently, this country is flying high on faith and believes in miracles. While gorging on an unknowing carcass its leaders call America, it says the economy is strong and that productivity is on the upswing. For the elite few, it may be true. However, from the slave’s position, it simply means that more and more people are being laid off and others made to work even harder. This country laughs in the face of working people as it continues to develop ever more effective propaganda strategies to continue selling a dream that has died so long ago. At some point, reality must set in. We know it, they know it, for when theft is occurring, and it is finally found out, the natural reaction is to lynch the thief.

There is a saying that one must keep friends close by and enemies even closer. In a way, this country’s leaders are following that advice. Since they are fast eliminating its friends at home and abroad, and with a greed so great that like the hopeless drug addict it must steal from its own family, they are now keeping a closer eye on those they begin to see as enemies; those that might decide soon to lynch them. Thus, they are now monitoring everyone within their imposed borders somewhat in an analogous manner as the institutional church confessors once did for the colonizing forces, gauging the mood of a people.

However, now it is being done through technology — electronic purchases, library book borrowing, cameras, email, internet, telephone monitoring, and ankle bracelets, among others.

Identification is now coupled with association and location control is almost total. We are born and numbers track our entire life—from our personal social security numbers, driver’s license identification, to an increasing number of transactions as we personally buy into the system. Free travel is a complete misnomer and is in fact also tracked from imposed border to border by passport, and in some cases must meet with additional dispensation through special pre-travel authorization permits called visas.\(^4\)

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**For the colonizer the only answer to its self-created problems is to build even more walls**

Beginning this year international passports will be required even to walk back and forth between the hate walls that separate our stolen lands and next year we may all be outfitted with national identification cards. The Department of Homeland Security also keeps secret lists of people who cannot enter this country and others of those that cannot exit. No-fly lists have now become notorious for keeping political activists off airplanes and from practicing their freedom to assemble. As those that would ignorantely also say that there is a free press, some would say that no one is really restricting them from traveling in some other manner. Sure, one can still walk and buy a newspaper.

So physical separation from others is important to create the mental distances between peoples and cultures. Once this division is created, those others are to be seen as unsupported aliens, and thus less than thou art, and will be easy to denigrate should their norms not meet with the selfish expectations of the dominant society’s.\(^3\)

Moreover, the more this country’s economic fortunes sink the effects can be likened to the sight of defeated refugees retreating into their walled fortresses as the hordes are biting at their heels. Walls go up everywhere. The sight of what they have wrought is too much for them to tolerate. Therefore, they must segregate themselves.

As the haves become less, an ever larger buffer zone of so-called keepers of the peace are hired to protect them from the have-nots and they increasingly isolate themselves within their walled enclaves of gated communities. When even these walled refuges are feared to be overrun, even bigger concrete and metal walls are built on imposed borders to try to stem the flow of those lured by what they may have. Little do they know that the walls then become a trap from which no one may escape — compound problems and increasing repressive measures. As Aimé Césaire once wrote, “Between colonizer and colonized there is room only for forced labor; intimidation, pressure, the police, taxation, theft, rape, ... contempt, mistrust, arrogance, self-complacency, swinishness, brainless élites, degraded masses... extraordinary possibilities wiped out.”

Internally, the colonized must be kept a passive commodity. When indoctrination of the American Dream does not work, other more drastic measures must be taken. For the colonizer the only answer to its self-created problems is to build even more walls — in some cases to keep the slave in and in others to isolate those that would unsettle its peace. Therefore, we the colonized go from imposed border walls, to educational walls, employment glass ceiling walls, prison walls, prison walls within prison walls, and for those young homeboys it wishes to commit to feed the prison walls, it creates virtual walls called gang injunctions that not coincidentally always border low-income Raza neighborhoods where economic walls have always existed. **contract “provides for establishing temporary detention and processing capabilities to augment existing ICE Detention and Removal Operations (DRO) Program facilities in the event of an emergency influx of immigrants into the U.S., or to support the rapid development of new programs.” Additionally, the “contract may also provide migrant detention support to other U.S. Government organizations in the event of an immigration emergency, as well as the development of a plan to react to a national emergency, such as a natural disaster.”**
WHERE HAVE ALL THE BOYS GONE?
By John Marc Taylor

The current cause célèbre in higher education is the issue of the growing gender disparity between men and women enrolling in, and subsequently graduating from, the nation’s colleges. Articles and editorials in major news magazines and papers, lamenting the disappearing male co-ed, have us wondering where have all the boys gone?

Some articles have analyzed the phenomenon more encompassingly than others. Facets of class, race and economics, among demographic criteria, were all considered, but with only throw-away mention is the contribution of incarceration.

The incarceration of huge numbers of citizens not only impacts the potential student pool, but also adversely affects the costs for those still free to matriculate. The barely mentioned factor of incarceration — and related financial aspects — has not been placed in context nor analyzed for its rippling impact.

As a whole, the United States has the highest per capita incarceration rate, imprisoning one-quarter of the world’s prisoners with less than five percent of the planet’s population, but moreover proportionally incarcerating nearly ten times the number of black males than South Africa did during the height of apartheid.

With the fundamental restructuring of our society, relying on the prolific use of incarceration to control marginalized elements of the populous, an African-American male will be twice as likely to end up in a prison as on a college campus. Already, as a consequence of these practices, there are more African-American men imprisoned than enrolled on the nation’s universities. Despairingly, more African-American men this year will receive prison-earned G.E.D.s than college degrees.

When a substantial number of a demographic is structurally excluded from a recruitment cohort, disparity is a readily predictable result.

Not surprisingly, then, with minorities composing nearly two-thirds of the two-million-plus penal population, black and Hispanic men are the most under-represented group on campuses, followed by poor white males.

From 1985 to 2000, as prison populations soared, inflation adjusted state spending for penal operations correspondingly rose by 166 percent, while investment in higher education grew by an anemic 24 percent. In aggregate, over the last two decades of the twentieth century, prison spending expanded from 2.1 to 6.3 percent of the collective national budget, as investment in higher education inversely contracted from 8 to 4.3 percent.

This shift in state resources from supporting colleges and universities to funding the expansion of the prison-industrial complex has been a driving cause behind the 202 percent average tuition increase at public universities, compared to the 80 percent inflation rate in the consumer price index over the past twenty years.

As tuition rates accelerated faster than wage growth, family incomes, particularly those in the lower quintiles, have not kept pace. Nationally, tuition for public universities now consumes one-quarter of poor families total income, double what it was two decades ago. Financial aid packages have not commensurately increased to help alleviate the growing burden, further distancing those able to afford higher education and those not. The middle class, meanwhile, graduates in greater and greater debt, in the end subsidizing a penal system bloated beyond all comparative measure.

If these trends continue, warns Patrick Callahan, president of the National Center or Public and Higher Education, “increasing numbers of students may be discouraged from attending” college, with most of them being poor.

This is already transpiring. In 2002, over 400,000 high school graduates were unable to afford enrollment at California public universities — once the national leader in affordable state-supported higher education. California now is the largest penal colony among the commonwealths and spends more on prison than on colleges — with 170,000 potential students even locked out of less expensive community colleges.

Where have all the boys gone? If not working at McDonalds or Walmart, priced out of college classrooms, more and more are locked up in Attica, Folsom and Leavenworth, or one of the 2,000 other prisons and jails stretching across the land of the free.

John Marc Taylor, a Missouri prisoner, is a past recipient of The Nation / I.F. Stone and Robert F. Kennedy Journalism Awards for his reporting on correctional education.

Editor’s note: Footnotes and a bibliography, were omitted for reasons of space.

AN INTERVIEW WITH MUMIA ABU-JAMAL

By Adrienne Appel and John Grebe

Mumia Abu-Jamal, a journalist and black activist who exposed corruption in the Philadelphia police department, is among the best known of America’s 3,500 death row prisoners. For years, lawyers have been fighting to overturn his 1982 murder conviction. They argue that Abu-Jamal was condemned due to his skin colour and undue influence from the powerful Fraternal Order of Police.

Abu-Jamal and his chief lawyer, Robert Bryan, are currently awaiting a decision from the U.S. Court of Appeals in Philadelphia on their request for a new trial. If a re-trial is ordered, many believe it will be one of the most sensational in U.S. legal history.

In this rare interview from Pennsylvania’s death row, Abu-Jamal talks about being a journalist on death row with Inter Press Service correspondent Adrienne Appel and radio journalist John Grebe.

“Writing from a radical and populist, black liberation point of view, never left me,” he says, “We do truly live in amazing times, times that are challenging, times that are dangerous -- but also times that are inspiring.”

IPS: Through your radio broadcasts and columns about politics, race, black liberation and the death penalty, you have continued to be a leader for those on the left, and I suspect an inspiration to those in prison and on death row. Do you hear from others on death row?

MUMIA ABU-JAMAL: I do actually receive letters from guys literally all around the country and - truth be told - around the world. Some express solidarity, many request to correspond, some just ask questions about history because they’ve heard of my history with the black liberation movement. I know that many people on death row are projected as monsters and really evil people. The fact of the matter is, most of the people I’ve met, I’ve heard about, or know about on death row are on death row because of their poverty. If they were men or women of means and could have afforded a decent defence at their trials, many wouldn’t be in jail. And if they were not in jail, they wouldn’t be on death row.

IPS: You have great support in Europe

Essays............Continued on page 19
Around five o’clock, we arrived in Arcata, and headed to the Wildflower Café, a cute little vegetarian restaurant in the “downtown” area. Arcata is a small town with about 15,000 people, many of whom are students at Humboldt State University. In Arcata, we met with Marlene, an activist from our sister organization up north, Bar None (http://www.barnone.mahost.org/). Bar None makes available a resource list, names of pro bono attorneys, and other resources to prisoners. They work hard and are an important watch group. Small or large groups like this are needed near all the prisons. They help make the CDCR adhere to the state regulations.

Marlene is a veteran of these trips, and she began explaining the process to Penny and I, who were making our first trip. After dinner, we drove to Sam’s house, where we picked up her and Sacha, another veteran of these trips. We then started the hour-and-a-half drive up the dark, two-lane highway to Crescent City, home of PBSP.

As we drove, the sky was almost black, yet dotted brightly with stars. You can’t see the stars like this in the Bay Area, and we were blessed with good weather the whole trip. Out of the car window you could see the moon glistening on the Pacific Ocean. As we neared Crescent City, we began to see many motels and fast food places, most likely for the families who come up on weekends to visit their loved ones who are behind bars. Each motel advertised cheap rates, free breakfast, and vacancies.

After we settled into our modest motel rooms, Sacha and I created files for each interview, and assigned each one to a particular person. In each file were letters or other documentation sent to us, along with a post-it note with their name, housing, and California Department of Corrections (CDCR) number. After we finished the files and assignments, we talked more about what to expect the next day and then went to bed. I know I, filled with trepidation over what the next day was to bring, tossed and turned in my bed all night.

Thursday morning, the five of us met in the parking lot at 7:30 a.m. to head over to the Great Harvest Café. The café, a locally-owned restaurant that serves vegetarian and organic food, seems to be out of place in Crescent City. We ordered and as we waited for our food, Sacha and I divided up the files and gave them to the rest of the group. After eating, we got in the car for the short 15-minute drive outside of town to the prison. For the most part, we were all dressed head to toe in black. The CDCR doesn’t allow visitors to wear clothing that is the same color as the prisoner’s uniforms, so red, blue, yellow, tan, khaki, and all denim clothing are forbidden. Black is considered a “safe” color to wear when visiting.

When we arrived at the prison around 8:30 a.m., there was no one in the guard booth leading to the prison. We drove right in and parked at in the parking lot nearest to the Security Housing Unit (SHU). SHUs are freestanding prisons within prisons said to be designed to isolate and punish prisoners who have broken prison rules, committed crimes in prison, or are assigned there for administrative reasons. Prisoners are locked in their bathroom sized cells 22 1/2 hours a day. There is no work or vocational programs available and prisoners eat in their cells. Many prisoners are put in the SHU for indeterminate amounts of time, others for a set amount of time. There are upwards of 5,000 prisoners living in SHUs through out the CDCR system. One person we met has been in the SHU since 1989.

When we entered the SHU, the correction officers (c/os) gave us a nasty look. We announced that we were from California Prison Focus, and the officer behind the desk told us to show him our IDs so he could check if we were on the list of cleared visitors. He checked, and thankfully, all of us had been cleared. He handed us back our IDs and told us to take off our shoes, coats, and bags, and put them on the counter. He then went through our pockets and bags to see if we had any contraband. We then went through the metal detector one at a time. Penny was hand wanded because she has a metal implant in her knee. We finally made it through, and another officer was called to escort us to the SHU visiting area. This was a female officer who seemed used to dealing with the public, as she tried to be chatty and nice.

As we left the screening area, over to the left I noticed a glass case advertising the sale of t-shirts, hats, mugs, and sweatshirts embroidered with the PBSP logo. Some of them advertised it as “Pelican Bay State Hotel.” Another advertised it as the home of “The Worst of the Worst.” This is phrasing that prisoners are not allowed to use to describe themselves, yet the prison was capitalizing off of the whole situation.

In the visiting area while waiting for our first interview to begin, we saw prisoners locked in the public visiting booths. Then we learned that staff was doing door...
maintenance in their housing area and they needed a place to hold the prisoners. Some smiled at us, some glared, but the vast majority of prisoners just ignored us. It was unsettling to see these people basically caged in the booths. In this setting we prepared the legal meeting booths, which consisted of speakerphones and heavy glass partitions.

We were told that because of the door maintenance we would only be able to see prisoners from section C because section D prisoners could not be out of their cells at the same time. This impacted the number of people we were able to see in the SHU area that day, down to six people. For the first two visits, we paired up so that the three of us who were new could see how an interview was conducted. We had a typed questionnaire, but the visits went more like conversations and less like official interviews. Most people were hungry for conversation, and even hungrier to talk about their issues. Many had not had a visit in months, or even years, and conversation with someone other than a c/o was a luxury. And as you know, most people were hungry for conversation, and even hungrier to talk about their issues. Many had not had a visit in months, or even years, and conversation with someone other than a c/o was a luxury. And as you know, luxuries don’t exist when you are in prison.

The first day we saw six people in the SHU. We then went to general population and were rescreened through security. There, we saw five people. These 11 people were significantly less than the 18 people we had been hoping to see. The whole day, the officer gave us excuse after excuse to why it was going so slow: door maintenance; the prisoners not being allowed to be in the hall together if they were from the same pods; count; shift change. Put together, all of the excuses seemed like they were meant to slow us down. And they did slow us down. We left the prison around 3 p.m., and headed to Los Compadres to eat, check in, and at least for me, make sense of the day.

At the restaurant, we all shared stories of prisoners we talked to [using confidential practices]. In spite of everything, some stories of hope and encouragement exist. One prisoner we met with wants to start a nonprofit organization to mentor young men to keep them out of the prison. This same prisoner uses his time in the SHU to paint. Denied art supplies by the prison, he uses his hair as a paintbrush and soaks the color off of M&Ms to make the paint. He has also written a book about his time behind bars.

Another prisoner has used his time in prison to get an education, earning his GED, an AA, and an optician certification. He talked about making 95 cents an hour, and being proud to be employed when a majority of people in Pelican Bay weren’t. He was pleased he didn’t have to lean on his family to pay for his necessities in prison.

Of course, we heard many, many stories of abuse and official neglect. Many prisoners were having trouble receiving medical care. One prisoner, with a chronic back issue, needs an additional mattress and pain medication; this accommodation was made in the last prison he was in. Here, however, the prison has denied him access to a doctor, denied the additional mattress and told him to buy ibuprofen from the commissary. Another prisoner, a psychiatric patient, doesn’t receive the proper medication for his mental illness. Instead, the prison just sedates him. We also heard issues of lack of food, months-long lockdown, feces coming up into one toilet when another is flushed. Televisions were being taken away from those housed in administrative segregation (Ad Seg). Some prisoners believe pharmaceutical companies are using prisoners as guinea pigs. Prisoners are also restricted to the kind of drugs can be available to them and many are being forced to take medication that doesn’t help their disability or ailment. Most of the prisoners we visited were affected heavily by the extreme conditions in this remote prison. The prisoners are isolated in the outback region of the north coast and then further in the SHU and Ad Seg Units. Severe depression is a big issue throughout the prison.

The food is of poor to “horrible” quality and never enough. It is many times unrecognizable, old and served cold. It is unhealthy. Prisoners complained of losing a lot of weight.

Probably the most we heard about was the 602 process, which is the only internal process for making complaints. The prisoners have to submit their 602 (complaint) forms to a guard. They worry, with apparent good reason, that their forms are disregarded or lost. The 602 process is lengthy and contains at least three steps that involve a prisoner having a basic understanding of legal language. California Prison Focus is continually working to get the abuse of this process noticed, by conducting surveys about whether the forms are filed by the guards as required by law, and whether adequate responses by the prison officials are given. In years past, outside attention has made important changes in making the CDCR comply with their own rules, and we have had a measure of success improving the 602 process at Corcoran.

After we ate and commiserated, we left for the motel. It was around 5 p.m., and we were exhausted. The emotionally charged day, coupled with the driving of the day before, as well as the lack of sleep, finally took its toll. We fell asleep, and then met up again to prepare for the next day. We reviewed the files of the men we were going to meet. We then returned to our rooms, and repeated the stories of the day to our roommates, shocked that humans were forced to live under such conditions. And when all had been vented, we turned on the television and vegged out before going to bed.

Friday morning, we again met in the parking lot at 7:30 a.m., this time with our bags, as we had checked out of our rooms. We headed back to the Great Harvest Café and shared our stories of talking and vegging out the previous night. As we ate, we reviewed our game plan for the day. Once again dressed in black, we drove out to the prison, arriving around 8:30 a.m.

There, we were told to go to general population first. When we arrived, we were told we needed to wait for the female guard from the day before so she could be our escort. After a half hour she arrived, only to be told she would not be our escort and that they had to call another guard. We waited another ten minutes for him to arrive. We were put through security, yet again. Even Penny had to be wanded again due to her metal knee. When we finally passed security, it was close to 10 o’clock.

We sat in general population for some time, waiting for them to bring in prisoners from A section. These interviews were of particular interest as we wanted to gather information on a melee that had happened about a week before on the yard. We were able to meet with about five prisoners in the general population before we were told we had to head over to the SHU. Physically, the most striking visits was with a prisoner who had white power tattoos on his forehead and hands. Marlene and Penny did this interview, and paid no attention to anything other than the task at hand, to interview prisoners to learn of human rights abuses. We learned the fight was between the Northerners and the Southerners who got into a disagreement. A large fight ensued, someone may have been stabbed, and the c/os made everyone lie on the ground to get things under control. After about 40 minutes we were told we would be going back to the SHU. I believe we saw five men there.

We drove back over to the SHU, aware that our time left was going to be tight. Once we arrived, we were made to go through security once again, our fourth time in two
days. After passing the screening, our less than friendly escort brought us into the visiting area. Gone were the men who were being warehoused there the previous day. It was eerily quiet, a stark contrast from the bustle of the day before when the prisoners were housed in the visiting booths. Again, we sat around waiting for the guard to call for our interviews. Sacha kept approaching him and asking what was going on. He would answer her with short, curt answers that he was working on it.

Finally, they brought down some prisoners. We interviewed three, and then they brought down three more. As we were visiting with the second group of men, the c/ose abruptly came and opened the door and told us that “something” had happened and all prisoners were being recalled to their cells. I sat there stunned for a minute, then got angry and went to see what was happening. The guard at the desk didn’t really answer my question. One of the other girls told me she saw c/ose running towards general population. Finally, our escort told us that there had been an “incident” on one of the yards and we were going to have to leave. We conferred for a few moments before we were pushed out the door.

Once we left the Pelican Bay SHU, we went to the prison’s administrative building. The women from BarNone had an appointment at 3:00 p.m. with Dr. Sayer, PBSP’s chief medical officer. We asked to meet with him early since the rest of the day’s visits were cancelled. After a few minutes we were told that all medical personnel had been called to B yard and that our appointment with Dr. Sayer, too, had been cancelled. We sat and pondered what may have happened, and before too long, decided to go eat lunch and then head back to Arcata for the evening.

As I write this, it has been three weeks since our trip to PBSP. I am still processing everything I saw and learned and am more deeply committed than ever to making sure that those whom this society has tried to marginalize and hide from sight, do not remain on the margins and instead have their stories reach the light of day. I am left with haunting images: voices of men who though living in silence, have not been silenced; though bearing inhuman conditions, still struggle to affirm their humanity; though locked up, they maintain the hope of freedom.

It is strength and courage that allow prisoners to survive through the inhumane conditions that exist at Pelican Bay. ♦

CDCR SCAPEGOATS KATHLEEN SOLIAH

Kathleen Soliah (a/k/a Sara Jane Olson), a former member of the radical Symbionese Liberation Army, was released on parole in late March from a California women’s prison after serving about six years behind bars for her role in a plot to kill Los Angeles police officers by blowing up their patrol cars. She had been sentenced to 12 years in prison. Like most California prisoners, Soliah earned credit against her sentence for working while in prison; she served on a maintenance crew that swept and cleaned the main yard of the Central California Women’s Facility in Chowchilla. Within days of her release Sara was rearrested, after state officials said they erred in calculating her prison sentence and that she will need to be locked up for another year.

Now it turns out that SEIU Local 1000 (SEIU Local 1000 is California’s largest state employee union, representing 87,000 rank-and-file state employees) has uncovered data which contradicts assertions by the California Department of Corrections concerning Sara’s release date.

Reports from CDCR headquarters indicated Olson’s early release was the result of a clerical error in 2005. Through our investigation, Local 1000 has found CDCR administrators and supervisors have reviewed the Olson case at least four times since December 2007 and found no errors. That includes three reviews by prison supervisors of the time calculation in 2008 without any changes to Olson’s release date.

“This is nothing but a political cover-up to scapegoat our union members,” said Jim Hard, president of SEIU Local 1000, which represents 15,000 civilian employees in the state prison system. “This is the latest manifestation of ongoing problems which we have been trying to address. We even filed a lawsuit in December to force CDCR to address these issues.” The lawsuit in Sacramento Superior Court is still pending.

“Governor Schwarzenegger doesn’t want the public to see there is a massive structural problem with the sentencing and release system,” Hard said. “He knows that would worry the public. He and CDCR would rather point the finger and let somebody else take the blame for their oversight.”

This cover-up and scapegoating by CDCR comes following an action last December. Local 1000 asked the California Superior Court to declare that CDCR has violated the state Constitution, laws, regulation and policy by failing to recalculate release dates for up to 33,000 prisoners as required by recent court documents. ♦

Compiled from various sources by CPF.
WHAT TO TELL YOUR FAMILY ABOUT THE PAROLE PROCESS

By Charles Carbone, Esq.

You love your family. They have been there through the thick and thin of your life and conviction. And no matter what family dynamics may exist, they have stood by you. You may have asked them for as little as you could even though they have given you so much.

And now you are thinking what can you tell them about the parole process so that they understand how it works in California. You want them to be informed, but not to lose hope.

Many life prisoners report that their family (understandably) can’t fathom the parole process. After all, to your family, you have served your time, and over-served it. You are eligible for parole and the fact that you are not yet coming home is perplexing to them. Maybe some family member even blame you for not coming home, or have tired of writing support letters that seem to do no good whatsoever. Your family is tired of having their expectations dashed, and they are growing frustrated by the whole parole process which never seems to bear fruit.

Reminding your family of these few points can go far. Tell your family:

1. Don’t give up hope. Family may be inclined to grow tired and burn-out after riding the parole roller coaster with you. And some of those in the family may begin to think that the effort is futile. It’s not. Parole is possible, and in fact, in many cases, parole comes. Family is essential during the parole process and once released.

2. Be realistic. You won’t get paroled on your first or second appearance before the board. Getting a date takes time and hard work. It is a long-haul and while you can speed up the time frames, it will take a long time.

3. Family contact matters. The board looks at whether the prisoner has had regular and sustained contact with family. Whether your family and you have remained close via letters and visits does carry significant weight. In fact, this is required by the board.

4. Family must help out with residence plans and job offers. Having secure and realistic plans for a home to live in and a job to report to are absolute imperatives in the parole process. Without these plans, the lifer is going nowhere. And with years of separation from society, ex-prisoners will need to rely on the family for resources and leads. The family can be the critical transitional bridge between prison and society.

5. Family can help in the reconciliation process. The victim and the victim’s family in your crime will often want an apology even though they may not ask for it. Having your family involved in the apology process can be enormously helpful. Suggest that your family review your apology letter, and work towards writing their own to the victim and his/her family.

6. Family members can be a great sounding board and reality check for your growth and rehabilitation. Often times, prisoners haven’t done enough delving into the reasons for the life crime. Family members can often be the best source of information when reflecting on past mistakes.

7. Family may be able to help with substance abuse issues, and locate critical substance abuse resources (if this applies) that you can use once released. The board will want to see proof of a prisoner’s ability to stay sober on the outside, and having your family identify residence programs, counselors, and 12-step meeting locations can be a big help.

8. Provide educational and self-help resources. In a California prison system with increasingly slim opportunities for rehabilitation, family members can step-in and provide that missing link by identifying and paying for correspondence courses, self-help course works, and reading materials if possible.

9. Conduct an independent psychiatric risk assessment. It is possible to hire an independent psychologist who can offer you both therapy, counseling, as well as generating a risk assessment that can be offered to the board.

10. Ask family to write many letters of support. These letters matter. They should be dated (with each letter being written within six months of the hearing), specific, and brief (no more than two pages). Tell you family to keep the letter on a computer so that it can be easily updated every time you appear before the board.

11. Family members should consider joining a larger network of family members of prisoners such as TIPS (Taxpayers Improving Public Safety or California Prison Focus. Being politically connected can also pay off big if a legislator or his/her aide can write a letter of support.

12. Although it is rarely granted, your family can appear as a witness in your parole hearing. Having a family member act as a witness can educate them quickly on the parole process as well as helping to tame a rude or adversarial board commissioner.

13. Hire a good, or great parole lawyer. Your family can be your best shot at finding and hiring your attorney for the board and for an appeal.
14. Your family can help with the courts if they have the adeptness. Your family can help with the courts. They can help by retaining your key legal documents, making copies, and getting legal documents filed with the court. If they are willing, family members can be a crucial enabler for simple legal tasks.

15. Marriage? Love can’t be sought to satisfy parole concerns, but if you are lucky enough to have love and marriage find you, a spouse can prove to be a powerful ally in the parole process. A spouse can prove the existence of stable, loving and healthy relationships along with providing assurances of a support network on the outside.

16. Repair family relationships. Often times, the product of a criminal history leads back to an “unstable social history.” Embedded in this history is often the existence of fractured relationships. If old wounds can be healed, the board looks upon this as a sign of maturity, healing, and personal growth.

17. Ask family to help financially. They have probably already spent too much on helping you fend off the criminal conviction. And yet, financial help isn’t over. Family members can make important financial pledges by setting up a financial trust for your use upon release.

18. Be sure to monitor your health. Being sick while in prison is a nightmare. And being sent to prison in California too often involves needless exposure to communicable diseases. Ask a family member to sign a “HIPPA” compliant medical release for your medical records so that a family can get your medical records quickly if you fall ill.

19. Pay tribute to your victim. A family member can assist in finding a productive and meaningful way for you to donate or contribute to a cause or charity in memory of your victim. This form of restorative justice shows the board your remorse is more than talk. Consider doing something that fits with the values and interests of your victim, if known to you.

20. Ask for love. It may seem self-evident or silly, but a family’s offer of love, forgiveness, and togetherness is the greatest means of support, and upliftment that can sustain a person doing time. Give it freely.

ANOTHER STRATEGY ON PAROLLING

By Penny Schoner

Here is what worked for me in the past:

1. Allow the state of California to provide you with an attorney to represent you at the parole hearing. These attorneys are approved by the State Bar Association, just like private attorneys. You will be assigned an attorney about four to six weeks before the actual hearing (dates get put off sometimes). If you prepare a packet for presenting to the parole board, then that attorney will be able to represent you with your own words.

2. Summarize all of your records while you have been inside. This can be done as soon as you start making plans to go to the Board. Then as soon as you get the name of the state appointed attorney you can mail that person your whole packet and your case will be easy for him to present.

3. A place to live needs to be identified by address and pictures. If you have a relative that is the best, but a community that will assist you until you get on your feet is just as good.

4. Find a halfway house situation to go to when paroled. The parole board likes this kind of research by you. Maybe you will use it, maybe not, but finding one for reference is important.

5. A promise of a job: find any job by reading newspapers or contacting outsiders and then applying, applying. Jobs have training for you, after you are hired, so know that this is available and in your letter to the parole board, write about how hard you will work to become skilled in whatever job you get.

6. Put together a one-page resume, with a photo of yourself, if possible, for job hunting. Ask for help in assembling this. It makes a very good impression to the parole board, as well as helps you job search.

7. List your accomplishments while in prison: the programs and courses you have completed, the dates and locations. Ask a helper outside to copy all your certificates so they can be presented in the packet to the parole board.

8. List your schooling and show that you are still trying to educate yourself, by signing up for classes inside or outside the prison. If you are not currently enrolled, ask around; ask your counselor; write to colleges to find out how you can take classes — any classes. Keep showing that you are preparing for a future.

9. Find some of your old teachers to testify for you before the Board.

10. Remorse: This is important to the parole board, in order for them to determine whether you are ready for a new life, and have dealt with your crime. If you have contacted the victim or family and have letters; present them to the board. If you don’t have a letter of remorse concerning the victim or the victim’s family, then write one now and present it to the district attorney in the county where you were convicted.

11. The parole board is not interested in your personal religion. They are listening to your ability to build a new life, not how you worship. With respect for your private ways, religion is not how they judge your preparation for your future.
ARGUED WORST ISSUES AT TECHEACHI

Arguably the worst issues at Tehachapi are the food and medical care. The food is often served stone cold and less than edible with insufficient portions. The people who serve the food don’t wear hair nets and often have dirty hands. Regarding medical care: staff is often working with too many patients and do not seem to have enough training. One prisoner we heard from received the wrong dosage of medication. Another time, he received someone else’s medications. Yet another time, two of his medications were delivered crushed, and the person delivering them wasn’t sure what medications they even were.

It is reported that in December of 2007, one prisoner took his own life. Mental health staff had been criticized for being inefficient and uncaring. Reports say that since the suicide, mental health staff has been quicker to act, and are listening more to concerns.

Change in Tehachapi is obviously needed. Prisoner’s basic necessities and rights are being trampled upon. There are many abuses that need to be dealt with swiftly and promptly. But we can’t do it alone. We need to work together to expose these abuses.

FROM A CUBAN REVOLUTIONARY TO L.A. SOOVENS

To start my comment on a dialectical materialist note, I would say that the limitations our friend Sovens attributes to historical and dialectical materialism, are only a reflection of his own limitations on the understanding and knowledge of the subject.

Such limitations extend to his treatment of Cuba and compel these words, being as I am a Cuban political prisoner, incarcerated in the U.S. with four more comrades for protecting my people against American sponsored terrorism. Materialist philosophy—from Ancient Greece to nowadays—conceives matter as preceding consciousness—or mind—but in no way denies the last. To do so would be, for people like Haraclitus, Anaxagoras, Marx or Engels—strong minded ones—to deny their own essence at all.

According to dialectical materialism in the process of changing his material conditions of life, human beings engage also in a process of changing themselves—that is their own conscience, or mind—thus creating new material conditions, and a new level of consciousness, which in turn keep the dialectical dynamics of matter—mind flowing. An examination of the human experience would show that to be true either for arts, or philosophy, or sciences or for history, from the caveman to us. So, matter is not the only object of change. While changing his material world, the subject’s mind also becomes an object of change.

Applying this to the Cuban experience we can take the words of Che Guevara when he said that the best way to educate the people is to engage them on revolution. His second in command in Congo—just prior to the Cuban Revolution a black kid whose only contact with Africa had been the movies of Tarzan—would later describe how the revolutionary struggle turned him into a fully conscious internationalist fighter—who left a deep mark on several countries of that continent—in the span of a few years.

Today more that twenty thousand Cuban doctors help the poor on more than sixty countries, just like 360,000 volunteered years ago to fight the South African apartheid’s army. That is the result of a revolution that brought about a massive transformation of human consciousness—that is mind, or spirits—by creating the material conditions for a society where solidarity and justice can flourish. That would be impossible for people who—according to Mr Sovens—“just got a new, more polished boot shoved up their asses.”

To finish on a dialectical materialist note, I would remind Mr. Sovens that that prevalent ideas of any society are those of the class holding economic—and hence political power. In today’s world that is the capitalist class that not only shapes our material life to his convenience, but also imposes on us through all the means at his disposal their most convenient interpretation of that reality. That is reflected on the profusion of metaphysics and post-modernism people are fed up with, very convenient to demobilize the collective action of the masses by abstract “individual liberation of the mind,” equalization of oppressors to true revolutionaries, rewriting of history, distortion of reality and simplification of the philosophy of revolution. Slandering Cuba or spreading a limited version of Marxism

Scovens.................Continued on page 20
ONE IN 100 AMERICANS BEHIND BARS

Last year the U.S. prison population grew by 25,000 people bringing the world leader in incarceration to 1.6 million people in prison and 723,000 in local jails. For the first time more than one percent of the adult population is behind bars according to a new report from the Pew Center on the states.

Although out of style elsewhere, affirmative action continues in the criminal justice system. Black women are four times more likely to be imprisoned than white women. One in every 36 Latino men are locked up, and one of every 15 Black men. Eleven percent of Black men between ages 20 and 34 are behind bars.

“Being tough on crime is an easy position to take, particularly if you have the money. And we did have the money in the 1980s and 1990s, said Susan Urahn of the Pew Center. “Now, with fewer resources available to the states, prison costs are blowing a hole in state budgets.”

States spend an average of seven percent of all spending on corrections. California spends over eight percent. The fifty states combined spent $44 billion on corrections last year; California spent $10 billion.

INTERNATIONAL HERALD TRIBUNE, Feb. 28, 2008

MELEES

Nineteen people were injured including one seriously in a late afternoon brawl at Desert View Modified Community Correctional Facility in Adelanto, run by the GEO Group whose staff called local firefighters to help secure the facility.

A week earlier Folsom was locked down after a breakfast melee in the cafeteria involving hundreds of prisoners, three of whom required hospitalization.

LOS ANGELES TIMES, Feb. 24, 2008; KCRA, Feb. 18, 2008

MICHIGAN WOMEN PRISONERS WIN LAWSUIT

A Michigan court awarded ten prisoners and former prisoners $15.4 million and the jury issued a formal apology for ongoing acts of sexual violence against women in Scott Women’s Correctional Facility.

The jury found that women prisoners had been repeatedly raped and subjected to sexual harassment and invasions of privacy.

Seven of the ten plaintiffs are still in prison and all ten are part of another larger class action suit against the state that includes three women’s prisons. The ten plaintiffs filed their case in 1996, but over a decade of delays by the state kept it out of court until last year.

Earlier this year a c/o at Huron Valley Correctional Center was convicted of rape and sentenced to three years.

In 2000 Michigan settled a similar case brought by 31 women prisoners for $3.7 million.

DETROIT FREE PRESS, Jan. 31 & Feb. 1, 2008

TOP FUNDER FACES CRIMINAL PROBE

Henry Nicholas, the biggest individual donor to prison-expanding initiatives, is under federal investigation for allegedly failing to disclose backdating stock options. At the same time a former employee and his estranged wife charge in separate civil lawsuits that he regularly uses illegal drugs and hires prostitutes.

Going into the 2004 election, Proposition 66, which would have amended California’s Three Strikes law to require a violent or serious crime to trigger the Three Strikes sentence enhancement, seemed comfortably ahead. In all polls, Nicholas made a last minute $3.5 million donation to buy television time for Gov. Schwarzenegger, and Prop. 66 lost. More recently, Nicholas has donated millions more to the efforts to place other initiatives that would lengthen sentences, give victims more say at parole hearings and speed the death penalty.

ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER, Feb. 22, 2008

CIW STRIP SEARCH VIDEOS

Investigators at the California Institute for Women (CIW) have discovered that male and female c/o views of strip searches of women prisoners. During a visit in January, Rick Stachowicz, who was at CIW to visit his wife Christina, noticed a group of c/o watching a television monitor that showed a female c/o strip searching women elsewhere in the prison.

“It’s totally nude,” he said. He complained and received an email from Capt. Dean Borders that assured him, “This behavior is unacceptable and will not be tolerated by the administration. Sincerely, I do apologize for the actions of our staff.”

Borders said that CIW has stopped using rooms with video surveillance for strip searches and the television monitor has been removed from the area that visitors can see.

Senators Gloria Romero said, “We don’t invest $10 billion into corrections to run peep shows, essentially.”

SACRAMENTO BEER, Feb. 22, 2008

AB900 OFF TRACK

In testimony before the Senate Public Safety Committee, CDCR officials admitted that plans to build 53,000 new prison and jail beds are behind schedule and over budget. The legislature passed AB900, authorizing $7.5 billion more state debt last April to pay for the new cells, but CDCR told senators that no new beds would come online for at least 20 more months. The senators were also surprised to hear that the cost of the new prison space has increased 48 percent in the past 10 months to $222,000 per bed. Deborah Hysen and James Tilton of CDCR blamed “faulty assumptions” for the cost increases. Hysen also told the committee that the original plans did not include space for rehabilitative programs, an odd admission considering that the justification for passing AB900 was to relieve overcrowding and provide space enough for programming.

“I think we’re going to hear for some time, ‘We’re going to do, we’re going to do, we’re going to do,,’” Committee Chair Gloria Romero said, “but it seems that we never really get to the ‘we have done.’”

CDCR also testified that they expected to build fewer new jail cells, new prison hospital beds and fewer reentry beds than planned last year.

SACRAMENTO BEER, Feb. 20, 2008; SAN JOSE MERCURY NEWS, Feb. 20, 2008

LOCAL CONCERNS ABOUT AB900

As the CDCR plans to expand Wasco State Prison by 1,900 beds, raising capacity to over 8,000, local officials and residents expressed concerns. The city’s planning direc-
tor called for the state to build playing fields and other recreational facilities, improve and maintain roads and widen Highway 46. AB900 plans include a new reception center and a new level IV facility. Nearby Delano is slated for expansion of an entertainment center and a new level IV facility. AB900 plans include a new reception and maintain roads and widen Highway 46.

Federal Receiver Silled Fired

Judge Thelton Henderson dismissed Robert Silled from his job as receiver of the CDCR medical system and replaced him with law professor J. Clark Kelso. Silled has drawn much criticism for his abrasive style and, some have said, lavish spending. Judge Henderson said that Mr. Kelso would be a more appropriate receiver as the takeover moves into a phase requiring “a style of collaborative leadership.”

In what might be the first step in that new collaborative phase, Mr. Kelso announced that he would move offices to Sacramento from San Jose. He said that he hoped the courts could turn control of the health care system back to the state within four to five years. Two senior staff were terminated, but chief of staff John Hagar will remain, Kelso said.

States Seek Alternatives

Faced with massive budget crises, 18 states moved to reduce their prison or jail populations last year according to a new report from the Sentencing Commission. Four states including California made it easier to release prisoners earlier in their sentences. Four states including California expanded re-entry services.

“Although legislative sessions seldom close without some penalty enhancements being added to the criminal code, the tone and focus of many state legislative bodies has demonstrably shifted and, as a result, there is increasing opportunity for reform,” said the report. “There’s simply not enough money in state budgets,” said report author Ryan King. “That has brought a lot of legislators to the table with a willingness to look at alternatives (to building prisons).”

This January Gov. Schwarzenegger proposed early release for over 22,000 California prisoners and changes to parole policies that would reduce the prison population by another 6,000 and the number of people on parole by over 18,000.


Court Takeover of Juvenile System?

Lawyers with the Prison Law Office claim that promises the state made in settling a lawsuit about conditions in the state’s juvenile prisons have been broken and that the CDCR is “incapable of reform.” They claim that the juvenile justice division’s “failures are pervasive, severe and chronic.” The court filing says that the state’s three-year record makes “a mockery of compliance” in six areas: education, safety, medical care, mental health, disabilities and sex-offender treatment. Among the specific examples cited in the brief are: there is no adequate mental health care system in place; youth are locked in dark housing units up to 20 hours per day; computer printers were removed from medical clinics because they were “too nice for medical”; youth are not attending class the required four hours per day. At one prison school, 347 classes were cancelled over a three month period.

Los Angeles Times, Feb. 18, 2008

State Releases Thousands Late

A lawsuit filed by the SEIU has revealed that the CDCR is holding thousands of prisoners beyond their release dates. State law says that credits can reduce sentences for nonviolent crimes by up to 50 percent and for violent crimes by up to 15 percent. For those with both violent and nonviolent convictions, CDCR has been giving only 15 percent, even for that part of the sentence stemming from the nonviolent offense. A state audit showed that on average, those kept too long were kept an additional four months.

Between 2000 and 2004, the state paid out $468,280 in legal settlements to those detained too long. CDCR hopes to hire more staff to recalculate sentences.


High Desert Quarantine

In early February, the CDCR put High Desert State Prison and next door California Correctional Center on quarantine status because of an epidemic of influenza. With mre that 200 ill prisoners, prison officials suspended all visiting, restricted prisoner movement inside and outside the prison to emergencies only, and stepped up hygiene, including reminding staff to wash their hands and increasing the frequency of prison cleaning.

Scott Porter of CCC told reporters that staff at both Susanville prisons was being “trained to cover their coughs and are learning proper hand-washing procedures.”


TO ALL PRISONERS: A NOTE ON WRITING TO CPF

For ease and efficiency, please follow these guidelines when writing to CPF:

- Write your complete name, address, prison number and date on the letter
- Print legibly and be brief
- Indicate on the envelope who the letter is for (i.e., Newsletter, etc.)
- Write and underline if an action is requested (Although this does not guarantee a response)
- Do not send unsolicited legal or medical documents

A Word from Mary in England

Hello! I am writing from the other side of the planet. I am living in Sussex quite close to London which has a longitude of 0 So. There is eight hours difference in time. California has a longitude of approximately 120 W. UK, England and Wales and Scotland together are about the size of California and sitting between 50 and 60N lines of latitude while San Francisco is 40N. So England is colder, although the Gulf Stream coming from the Gulf of Mexico still provides us with warmth that is not available to people on the European continent.

I lived for thirty years in England before I came to USA in 1954 so I am used to the longer nights in winter and the chill and frost. I could have chosen to travel in spring or summer but I flew here in October. But I was not used to having no office to go to, nor any office equipment, not letters to answer, nor a prison trip to organize. After feeling quite English in California, even after 50 years, I now feel rather American. Because I have all my family
members here I had been here many times for a month at a time but now I knew I had to stay. I had burned my bridges.

This country has been settled for a very long time. Every village is permeated with history. Every church is mediaeval and many houses too. Perhaps that is why I feel older? But with old age comes moderation. Here the poor are not so poor and the rich not so rich. The prisons are not so large (built for hundreds rather than thousands) but often much older. The treatment of prisoners is not so brutish. The sentences are not so long and solitary confinement, not so solitary. Another important difference is the relative absence of ethnic groups and the tendency toward prison violence.

However, there are many deficiencies, not the least of these is the overcrowding. A judge has said that in the light of the consequent conditions prisoners should not have such long sentences. Another is the many mentally ill prisoners who are acknowledged to need a different environment and treatment but do not get it. While there is a cadre of inspectors here to serve for three years, after making a report to the Ministry of Home Affairs, similar to the Little Hoover Commission’s reports in California, the government here seems just as prone to ignore the recommendations of the investigatory agency as they do in California.

In both countries, the overcrowding have given rise to unrest. Here, according to the press, there has been an increase in suicides and, more recently, an increase in the number of prisoners asking for solitary confinement and treatment but do not get it. While there is a cadre of inspectors here to serve for three years, after making a report to the Ministry of Home Affairs, similar to the Little Hoover Commission’s reports in California, the government here seems just as prone to ignore the recommendations of the investigatory agency as they do in California.

There are folk here, of course, who care about the rights of prisoners. I am planning to see some soon. They will, I am sure, agree with me that prisons are doomed to fail as long as the nature of the human being is not recognized.

Let me know if there is anything you would like me to write about for the next issue. 

—Mary Rubach

MORE NEWS

MILLIONS IN THE SLAMMER: WE MUST REVERSE AMERICA’S ZEAL TO INCARCERATE

By Nomi Prins

The movie *Atonement* is a heart-breaking love story, and a historical WWII saga. Without giving away the ending, which must be seen to be adequately felt, it tells the tale of two lovers’ lives irrevocably changed by false testimony against one of them—for a crime he did not commit. Thus, it’s also a condemnation of unreliable witnesses, the willingness of people to believe the worst, particularly of those in a lower economic class, and the havoc that a false accusation and conviction can wreak upon human life. It’s a film and message that every judge, jury member, and prosecutor should see and consider before convicted or sentencing anyone accused of a crime.

On Dec.10, 2007 the United States Supreme Court voted 7-2 to recognize a gross injustice with respect to sentencing guidelines which disproportionately penalize those convicted of crack versus cocaine related crimes. The disparity gives equal punishment to a person caught with 5 grams of crack (a poor person’s cocaine) and one caught with 500 grams of coke (a drug dealer’s amount). In their validation of a federal district judge’s below-guideline sentence for a crack case, the supreme court reconfirmed the 2005 Booker ruling that federal judges could have more discretion in levying below-guideline sentences. They did not rule on the validity of the guidelines themselves.

This decision should be viewed as the tip of an iceberg. American prisons teem with non-violent offenders. Our juries are caught between wanting to rush home for the evening and wanting to appear law-abiding. Members are too quick to bow to the loudest voice amongst them, and not necessarily in The Twelve Angry Men direction. Meanwhile, false convictions, due to witness error, prosecutorial misconduct, inferior defense lawyers or coerced snitching, continue to destroy multiple generations of lives. They throw the idea of “equal protection under the law” under the same bus as our Declaration of Independence mantra of “life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.”

We’ve simply got to reverse this zeal to incarcerate. The United States has more prisoners and a higher incarceration rate than any other nation: more than Russia, South Africa, Mexico, Iran, India, Australia, Brazil and Canada combined. Nearly 1 in every 136 U.S. residents is in jail or prison. That’s 2.2 million people, an amount that quadrupled from 1980 to 2005.* (There were only 340,000 people incarcerated in 1972.) Adding in figures for those on probation or parole, the number reaches 7.1 million.

Over the next five years, the American prison population is projected to increase three times more quickly than our resident population. The federal prison system is growing four percent a year with 55 percent of federal prisoners serving time for drug offenses, and only 11 percent for violent crimes. Women are more likely than men (29 percent to 19 percent) to serve drug sentences, dismantling thousands of families. One-third of prisoners are first time, non-violent offenders. Three-quarters are non-violent offenders with no history of violence. More than 200,000 are factually innocent. Whether our citizens are wrongly incarcerated or exaggeratedly so, our prison figures are shameful.

Dec.19, 2007 marked the five-year anniversary of the 2002 exoneration of the five “perpetrators” who were originally caught, indicted, and convicted in the infamous Central Park jogger case. The five black and Hispanic youths, ages 14 to 16 at the time of their imprisonment, were exonerated only after they had spent between five and 13 1/2 years in prison for crimes they did not commit. Their freedom came late, even as it was conclusively confirmed by DNA testing results. At the time of their arrests, they confessed to crimes after prolonged interrogation by police.

The Innocence Project counts 210 people, mostly minorities, who have been exonerated post-conviction by conclusive DNA results (350 people have been exonerated including non-DNA related exonerations). Fifteen of them spent time on death row for crimes they did not commit. The average age at the time of their convictions was 26 years old. The average time served was 12 years. The total number of violent crimes that were committed because the real perpetrators were free while the innocent were imprisoned was 74.

The numbers may seem small, as those who favor a harsher penal system would argue, but they only consist of the cases that have been put through years of legal
battles to conclude innocence. They don’t include cases where there is no money left for the wrongfully convicted to fight for their freedom. They don’t include the cases of people who are so beaten down mentally or physically by their imprisonment, they can’t fight. They don’t include the ones who don’t even know what steps to take.

Freedom is a basic human right that is destroyed by a felony conviction. And in some states, so is the right to vote. Other casualities include the ability to adopt children, find housing and employment. The stigma is permanent. Thus any mistake in a court room, whether due to a self serving witness or an ambitious prosecutor, costs someone a part of their life, severing them from the fabric of a justice system designed to protect them. As Martin Luther King said from the Birmingham jail in 1963, “Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly.”

Thus, there’s more work to do. Providing judges more latitude to reverse jury convictions in which there’s no physical evidence, or there exists the potential of fraudulent or self-incriminating testimony coerced under hostile conditions or threats, would be another step in the direction of justice. Reducing guidelines substantially would also help, as would be alternatives to incarceration for non-violent offenders. Without addressing these issues, our prisons will continue to burst beyond the seams of their present 134 percent overcrowding rate, our prisons systems will continue to get more funding than our schools, and we will be a sadder nation for it.

*Nomi Prins is a senior fellow at the public policy center Demos and author of Other People’s Money and Jacked: How “Conservatives” are Picking your Pocket (Whether you voted for them or not). © 2007 Independent Media Institute. All rights reserved. http://www.alternet.org/story/72031/

**NATIONAL SURVEY SHOWS WIDESPREAD SEXUAL ABUSE IN DETENTION**

A national survey of prisoners, released by the U.S. Department of Justice’s Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS), confirms that sexual abuse plagues American prisons, derailing justice and shattering human dignity. According to the report, an estimated 60,500 prisoners held at state and federal prisons were subjected to sexual abuse in the past year alone.

The National Inmate Survey (NIS) is the first of its kind and covers more than 1.3 of the 2.4 million people currently in detention in the United States. Detainees held at county jails, juvenile facilities, and immigration detention centers were not included in the survey, nor were prisoners at half-way houses. The research method used in the report—asking prisoners directly and anonymously whether they had been subjected to sexual abuse in the past 12 months—sets it apart from previous attempts by the federal government to study the problem, which has relied entirely on data submitted by corrections officials.

“We know from speaking daily with prisoner rape survivors that the vast majority will never file a formal complaint, for fear of retaliation, stigma, or further abuse,” said Lovisa Stannow, Executive Director of Stop Prisoner Rape (SPR). “Not surprisingly, this report establishes a 15 times higher rate of sexual abuse than an analysis of formal inmate complaints over a one-year period, published by the BJS four months ago.”

Garrett Cunningham, a prisoner rape survivor from Texas and a member of SPR’s board of directors, is a case in point. “After being raped by a prison guard, I was devastated and terrified. I felt sure that filing a complaint would only make my situation worse.”

In this report, the BJS identifies the U.S. prisons with the highest and the lowest rates of sexual abuse. Alarming, five of the ten worst facilities are prisons run by the Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ). This finding confirms SPR’s own data, based on letters the organization has received from some 900 prisoner rape survivors nationwide; 20 percent of these letters come from men and women held in TDCJ facilities.

SPR urges corrections officials across the country to consider the BJS report a wake-up call. “When the government makes the grave decision to remove a person’s liberty, it takes on the responsibility to guarantee his or her physical safety,” said Ms. Stannow. “Whether perpetrated by staff or by inmates, sexual abuse in detention is a problem of poor prison policies and practices. It is not an inevitable fact of life behind bars.”

Source: Stop Prisoner Rape, Los Angeles, December 16, 2007. An international human rights organization, SPR is the only group in the U.S. dedicated exclusively to eliminating sexual violence against men, women, and youth in detention. SPR was instrumental in securing passage of the Prison Rape Elimination Act (PREA) of 2003, which mandated the BJS to conduct the NIS and publish the report released today. For more information, visit www.spr.org or call Lovisa Stannow at 213-384-1400 (ext. 103)

**UNITED NATIONS: TASERS ARE A FORM OF TORTURE**

A United Nations committee said that use of Taser weapons can be a form of torture, in violation of the U.N. Convention Against Torture. Use of the electronic stun devices by police has been marked with a sudden rise in deaths— including four men in the United States and two in Canada within a single week. Canadian authorities are taking a second look at them, and in the United States, there is a wave of demands to BAN them.

The U.N. Committee Against Torture referred Friday to the use of TaserX26 weapons which Portuguese police has acquired. An expert had testified to the committee that use of the weapons had “proven risks of harm or death.”

“The use of TaserX26 weapons, provoking extreme pain, constituted a form of torture, and that in certain cases it could also cause death, as shown by several reliable studies and by certain cases that had happened after practical use,” the committee said in a statement.

but not here in the U.S. What accounts for this difference?

**MAJ:** The [U.S.] media has really been an adversary and not an aide. The struggle waxes and wanes, ebbs and flows.

**IPS:** Public sentiment [in the U.S.] seems to be shifting away from the death penalty, especially in light of the 126 people who have so far been exonerated - six in Pennsylvania. Have you and your legal team sensed any change in attitude towards your case - more openness to the idea that you did not receive a fair trial?

**MAJ:** I can’t say that I have. How do you gauge such a thing? There are many people who - because of what they read in the paper - firmly believe I am no longer on death row. I have read articles to that effect. Unfortunately, those articles are misleading. I have never left death row for one day. I am on death row.

**IPS:** Are you confident you will receive a fair trial this time?

**MAJ:** I’ve learned not to be in the business of prediction. That’s a risky business. We’re certainly working toward that end and I’m certainly hopeful. But I’m not in the prediction game.

**IPS:** Of the 35 states with a death penalty, conditions on Pennsylvania’s death row are among the most inhumane. The 228 death row inmates are kept in solitary confinement 23 hours a day in small cells. You are kept shackled when not in your cell, even in the shower. You are not allowed physical contact with visitors, with no one at all. How does this affect you?

**MAJ:** It affects how you interact with family and friends, staff, people, females. It affects everything. Years ago in Huntington [another prison], I was taken to a dentist. As I was coming back and crossing the central portion of the prison, there were several hundred men walking toward their dining area. Because it had been so many years that I had been away from a large mass of people I froze; I just froze. The guard with me pushed my back and said, “C’mon Jamal,” but I couldn’t move. I was so stunned to be in the presence of hundreds of guys. I hadn’t been around a group for so many years. I didn’t know how to interact in that situation. For years I had lived in a cell or in a cage by myself.

**John Grebe:** As a young, working reporter what inspired you?

**MAJ:** My life as a writer on the staff of the Black Panther newspaper was about learning from people in the ministry of information of the [Black Panther] Party. That really did inspire me – even when I left the party, when it fell apart – writing from a radical and populist, black liberation point of view never left me. I learned some important lessons. When I talk to people in the biz I say I’m glad I never went to journalism school.

**IPS:** You’ve written five books from death row and produce weekly radio commentaries. Why do you still speak out?

**MAJ:** It’s still interesting. We do truly live in amazing times, times that are challenging, times that are dangerous—but also times that are inspiring. We have a government that for all intents and purposes now says that torture is cool. We have secret prisons, so-called black sites, where people from around the world are held in the name of the United States of America — whose names you cannot know. People who are tortured. I feel compelled to write because they move me. I’m still a writer, an author, a journalist. They touch me. I would be remiss if I did not write about those things. If you recall, after 9/11 quite a few of the journalistic mainstays in this country did not write about those things. They endorsed the war, they supported the war. They came with what some people would call a mimeograph service for the state. I chose not to take that role.

**IPS:** Pennsylvania death row has twice as many black people on it as white people, something that does not reflect the makeup of the population in Pennsylvania. What does this say about the courts in Pennsylvania?

**MAJ:** It says much about the courts in Philadelphia as opposed to Pennsylvania. Philly [Philadelphia] is a national leader in the death penalty business. Many cases that would be considered third degree or even volunteer manslaughter, or not guilty in other counties, become first degree [murder] or death [penalty] cases in Philly. That’s because the political system in Philly has been formed around the death penalty.

 Anyone who doesn’t believe in the death penalty is automatically excluded from the jury. Well that’s a different kind of jury. It’s profoundly unfair at its very foundation. If you pick a jury that is fundamentally unfair, you can only get a fundamentally unfair result.

**JG:** Do you currently have communication with people in the black liberation movement?

**MAJ:** There are many elders who I do hear from. They’re wonderful brothers and sisters. Many are no longer with us. But some of them are. I delight in having contact with many of those people. ♦

[Ed Note: A ruling in March denied a new trial. See page 11.]

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**IN MEMORY**

Rafael Chispas Sandoval, 67, Los Angeles


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**THE PRISON INDUSTRIAL COMPLEX**

*By Assata Shakur*

Never in our history has critical resistance to the status quo been more important. The growth of the prison industrial complex has been appallingly rapid and the escalating repression that has accompanied it is totally alarming. What future lies ahead of us? What are the implications for our children?

Those who are targeted as victims of the prison industrial complex are mainly people of color. They are Native Americans, Africans, Asians, and Latinos, who came from societies where there were no prisons and where prisons were an unknown concept. Prisons were introduced in Africa, the Americas and Asia as by-products of slaver and colonialism, and they continue to be instruments of exploitation and oppression. In the heart of the imperialist empires, prisons also meant oppression. The prisons of Europe were so overcrowded that prisoners were sent to the colonies and encouraged to enslave and colonize other peoples. In England, during the so-called period of expansion, there were not only debtor’s prisons for the poor, but also more than 200 crimes that were punishable by death. During the French revolution, the storming and
The prison industrial complex is not only a mechanism to convert public tax money into profits for private corporations, it is an essential element of modern neo-liberal capitalism. It serves two purposes. one to neutralize and contain huge segments of potentially rebellious sectors of the population, and two, to sustain a system of super exploitation, where mainly black and Latino captives are imprisoned in white rural, overseer communities. People of color are easy targets. Our criminalization and vil-lization is an Amerikkkan tradition. The image of the dirty-lazy-shiftless-savage-backwards-good-for-nothing-darkies has been the underpinning of the racist culture and ideology that dominates U.S. politics. One of the basic tenets of the U.S. revolu-tion was that only rich, white men have the right to have a revolution, anyone else who struggles for one is a terrorist or a sub-versive. The truth of the matter is that oppressed people have, and have always had a great deal more to be outraged about than taxation without representation.

Repression, torture, and beatings are as common in U.S. prisons today as they were on slave plantations. And political prisoners bear the brunt of this systematic brutality. Those who fight against oppression are thrown into dungeons, rather than those who perpetuate it. The prolonged torture of solitary confinement is being used, not only as a weapon against political dissent, but as a weapon against anyone who protests any of the injustices of the system. How can you fight against injustice, without demanding the liberation of political prisoners?

Unfortunately, there are more young people behind bars because they have been inculcated with and are reproducing the values of this decadent capitalist system, than those who are consciously struggling to change it. During the 1960s, when the movement was at its height, the prison population was only a fraction of what it is today. Those who institutionalized the kidnapping of Africans, those who orchestrated genocide against Native Americans, those who continue to plunder the treasures of the world, and who are responsible for the most heinous crimes on this planet, want to preach to us about law and order. Those who profit from human misery and deny us education, affirmation action, health care, decent housing, want to lecture us about morality. Many of us watch helplessly as our children imitate and internalize the greedy, ostentatious culture of conspicuous consumption, practiced by those who oppress us. We watch the same people who import drugs into the country, who distribute them in our communities, wage a war on us, in the name of fighting drugs.

The prison industrial complex is not a distortion of modern global capitalism; it is part and parcel of that system. It is not enough to fight against it; we must fight against the ideology that promotes it. Human beings are social beings and have a basic need to live in nurturing communities, instead of hostile ones. The people on this planet have an infinite potential to contribute to this planet and it is a crime to prevent us from doing so. Human beings have an unlimited ability to learn, to grow, to change, to be generous, to invent and to share. It is a crime to prevent young people from developing their talents. It is a crime to let individualistic values destroy the collective good. To those who rule this planet, we are all disposable. Our only value to them is the wealth that we are capable of producing. It is a system with no compassion, no love, and no faith.

What kind of mentality is it that would classify a five-year-old as being incorrigible? What kind of system would try a 12-year-old as an adult? What kind of mentality is it that would sentence a 20-year-old to life without parole? How can a system claim to be nonviolent, while praising the death penalty inside its borders, and bombing and killing innocent people all over the world? This is a system that sells and promotes and exports violence. It is a system that would rather warehouse and murder its young, than cultivate them. In this grotesque world with its grotesque, cynical values, it sounds naive to believe in people, and believe in our ability to create a better world.

But how can you believe in a future if you don’t believe in people who are going to make it? How can you believe in hu-

man rights unless you believe in human beings? How can you say you believe in justice, without believing in social justice, political justice and economic justice for all people?

The prison industrial complex not only destroys individuals, it destroys families and communities. If we do not destroy it, it will destroy us. I urge you to do everything you can to break these chains.

Free all political prisoners!
Free Mumia Jamal!
This and other material by Assata Shakur can be found at www.thetalkingdrum.com/blabla. On May 2 1973, Black Panther activist Assata Shakur (fsn) JoAnne Chesimard, was pulled over by the New Jersey State Police, shot twice and then charged with murder of a police officer. Assata spent six-and-a-half years in prison under brutal circumstances before escaping (being liberated by the Revolutionary Armed Task Force, led by the Black Liberation Army), out of the maximum security wing of the Clinton Correctional Facility for Women in New Jersey in 1979 and moving to Cuba. Assata’s co-defendant, Sundiata Acoli, remains in captivity at the U.S. Penitentiary in Allenwood, PA.
ED’S COMMENTS

By Ed Mead

“It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but their social existence that determines their consciousness.”

- Karl Marx

It is time to clean up our subscriber database again. Unless you have written to us or donated to us in the past year, please send us a note to confirm your address or your subscription will have to be cut off. It’s not that we are trying to prevent anyone from getting the newsletter who really wants it. Rather, we are just trying to avoid spending money on printing and mailing newsletters that end up in the trash because someone has been transferred or released. Remember, subscriptions for prisoners are for one year for a donation of $5.00 or more. This can be in stamps.

How bad is the database? We recently attempted to determine how many of the addresses we had for prisoners at High Desert State Prison were still valid. We sent a notification to 160 of them, and three weeks later we found that only 59 of the addresses were valid. Accordingly, if we do not hear from you before the next issue is mailed out, your name will be removed from the CPF database. Send notifications to:

Address Verification
California Prison Focus
1904 Franklin St., Suite 507
Oakland, CA 94612

Here is something interesting. Since few red headed people marry other redheads, and since brown hair is the dominant color, experts say that by the year 2100 there will be no redheads left. The question is not whether this is a good thing or a bad thing, it is merely a part of an unfolding process that will also eventually end race distinct.

The other night I was watching a program on the Discovery channel called “Before Dinosaurs,” which dealt with the evolution of life from the seas to the land. In China they found the remains of the first species of fish with an internal skeletal structure, and from this fish came all other forms of life with internal skeletons. In the same prehistoric seas was a predator with an external skeleton (exoskeleton), and from this species evolved all insects. The program was of course more detailed and complex than I mention here, but it nonetheless caused me to think how humans might evolve in the future, hundreds of million years from now.

As you know our sun will nova in a few billion years, and at the rate we humans are now devouring the resources of the planet Earth our species may need to move on to other planets and even live in space itself to survive much sooner than that. Many of these new planets will have conditions of existence far different than those on earth, and will require different survival mechanisms. The human race will also branch out into different species in order to meet these vastly different conditions. After millions of years of living in space, for example, the need for a skeleton may disappear altogether, while those living on planets with more gravity will need strengthened skeletal structures. My point is that there will be far larger differences, real differences, in the future of our species.

...we can all agree that we need more jobs, not jails, and that we need schools more than prisons.

When the issue of human skin color is looked upon from this long-range perspective, having a racist attitude against the guy in the next cell because of the color of his skin makes as much sense as hating someone with red hair. In any event, the real issue is one of class, and as prisoners we are all a part of the working class, which is oppressed by the ruling class—the class that has created these prisons as a part of its apparatus of repression.

Regardless of our differences in other areas, I think we can all agree that less than one percent of the population controlling ninety percent of the planet’s wealth, while people are sleeping in the streets and children go hungry, is flat out wrong. I think we can all agree that we need more jobs, not jails, and that we need schools more than prisons. In short, we need social and economic justice and that cannot come about without a socialist revolution. Anyone who thinks capitalism can be reformed, or that imperialism is a mere policy that can be changed within the context of the existing class system, is woefully misguided.

Moving right along, I read the other day that the American government creates 50,000 new laws each year, and over 2 million new regulations. If true, wow! Then we are told by the courts that “Ignorance of the law is no excuse!” Guess the old proverb is true, “much law, little justice.”

Oh, for those who thought the invasion of Iraq was anything other than an act of international armed robbery (to steal their petroleum), President George W. Bush made it quite clear in his signing statements under the recent Defense Authorization Act. He wrote that he did not feel bound by the law’s explicit prohibition against using the funding “(1) To establish any military installation or base for the purpose of providing for the permanent stationing of United States Armed Forces in Iraq,” or “(2) To exercise United States control of the oil resources of Iraq.” Not surprisingly, the bourgeois press has failed to mention this story. Some say that what’s happening in Iraq isn’t a war, but rather an illegal occupation (following the illegal invasion of a country that posed no threat to the U.S.) They say occupations are not won, they are ended. Hmmm......

Then we have something called “the war against terrorism.” But terrorism is a tactic used by the weak. You can no more declare war against terrorism than you can launch a war against the flanking maneuver—it’s a tactic dummy!

Here’s some news you may not see on CNN? The public bailout of private investment houses is about to start. This rescue is to be disguised as a plan to save homeowners at risk of default over the next several years. It would set up a new public corporation to purchase from the banks a large part of the $739 billion in mortgages at risk of defaulting, thus transferring the risk to taxpayers. So much for allowing the invisible hand of the capitalist market to take its course.

In other news, I am in the process of putting together a 2009 Convict Calendar. Any readers who have dates of prisoner events that should be noted in the calendar, such as any forms of resistance, like strikes, riots, etc., should mail them to me for possible inclusion. Send these submissions to Ed Mead, P.O. Box 69586, Seattle, WA 98168 (mail sent to me in care of CPF can take over three months to be delivered).

That’s it for today. Let me leave you with a quote from Helen Keller, the writer, lecturer, and advocate for the disabled (1880-1968). “There are no such things as divine, immutable, or inalienable rights. Rights are things we get when we are strong enough to make good our claim on them.”

Note: The views expressed in these comments are the opinions of the writer, and do not necessarily reflect the views of California Prison Focus or its members.
Letters ................. Continued from page 2

sponsored by families “Families United for Prison Reform” which will affect at least 90 percent of the prison population in one way or another. It has three main points: It repeals the Three Strikes law but unlike other Three Strikes initiatives this one involves and includes lifers. It would change the sentencing matrix for life top sentences and sets specific guidelines for parole eligibility the BPT would have to follow. It concentrates on the present and not what happened 20 years ago and puts a max date of release. This initiative changes work time credit from day to day to two days for each day worked. These changes are the broadest and most sweeping that we have seen since the 1970s. Don’t hesitate, get involved and lets flex our family and friends muscle—that’s the only way to do it.

Well enough said. Everyone needs to get schooled and get our families and friends informed, registered to vote, and organized. Together we can make a difference as the struggle continues even if you can’t see it all the time!

Gabriel Reyes, Pelican Bay

[Ed’s Response to Gabriel Reyes: Thanks you for taking the time to write. I always like hearing from Prison Focus readers, and I especially appreciate constructive criticism. It is true that I have never done time in California (other than a few extended stays in the old L.A. County Jail and a couple in what was then called the new one), but I have served about 35 years behind bars—doing life on the installment plan, starting at age thirteen. You might say I was a professional prisoner (now a retired one). And while I’ve never served real time in California, I have in other places (both state and federal) with a strong gang presence.

Back in the early 1970s I was an ex-convict and prison activist on the outside, when demands for support for prisoner grew great and there was no other support to be had, I became a part of a group called the George Jackson Brigade, and our first action was to bust into the headquarters of the department of corrections in the state capital and to plant a powerful bomb under the desk of the soon-to-be director of corrections for that state. The bomb went off at one in the morning and did structural damage to the building. We issued a communiqué demanding that the state stop brutalizing prisoners in the segregation unit at the Washington State Penitentiary at Walla Walla. These were men who had led the intense struggle to extend prisoner democracy at that facility. At the time I was also one of the leaders of the Washington State Prisoners’ Labor Union, and otherwise very active around prison-related issues.

I have mentioned this background not to thump my chest over how great I am, but rather to say that the filing of law suits and family members trying yet again to amend draconian sentencing laws is nice, but it is what we were doing back in the late 1960s and early 1970s. It’s a dead end. It’s long past time to move on—to organize!

After working with California prisoners for over ten years, the prisoners of that state (in spite of very rare exceptions) are still unable to rise to the level of even modest reforms.

You characterized my criticism of gang leaders as unfair. Tell me, then, where is this leadership? All I saw was race riots across the states prison system and jails, the internecine violence even spilling out into the streets. It may be that your captors are saying the same thing about your violent behavior toward each other, and you should certainly feel free to ignore what they say.

But when you hear the same thing from your most dedicated and longstanding outside supporters, and there are many of us telling you this, then maybe, just maybe, it is time for you to listen. In any event, you can bet your captors are not saying the same thing as me; they are not advocating that you transform the prisons into schools of liberation.]

LETTER FROM A RACIST

Dear Prison Focus:

As for my criticisms of your P.F. #28 editorial, I’m glad they were well taken. I can appreciate your time and experience within prison systems and you obviously have an intimate knowledge of some of the forces that generally operate inside the system. However, it seems to me that you are either misinformed about some things or that you allow your subjective ideology to taint your perceptions of objective reality. The latter is a comfortable habit to get into, I do it myself sometimes (it makes things easier), although I am a strict disciplinarian when it come to applying logic and reason to situations that require it. I certainly understand and acknowledge that ‘race issues’ play a role in some of the conflict that takes place in prison, but I reiterate that only a small percentage of such conflict has race at the

overriding issue. Drugs are the most conflict oriented issue in prison, even in California where the races are extremely polarized. Such conflicts ‘evolve’ into race issues a lot of the time (which is why the statistics read the way they do, and why your informants report what they do), but the fact remains that if you eliminate the drugs the races would have very little to fight over. Most purely racial conflicts revolve around territory (generally on new prison yards), and personal respect issues. Convicts don’t go around looking for problems, Ed, most would prefer to get store/packages, etc. (which you can’t get on lockdown); most convicts are actually very practical, dealing with issues as they are presented. Ed, in the ten years that I’ve been down (all on level 4 yards), I’ve only ever seen/heard of a few purely racial conflicts, more often I see self-correction to avoid such conflicts (some are just unavoidable). You may think I’m playing semantic games with you, Ed, as a racist I pay particular attention to how the races interact.

Skinhead Grinch, PB-SHU

[Ed’s Response to Skinhead Grinch: The above letter goes on to discuss other racial and political issues, which will not be addressed here. Instead I want to focus on the drug question and gangs. What I really want is open discussion and dialog on these issues.

If what the author says is true with respect to drugs, and I believe it is, then why aren’t prisoners doing something to eliminate drugs on the inside? The Black Liberation Army saw the destructive effects of drugs and was working to eliminate drug dealers from their communities. Why aren’t prisoners doing the same?

If you want responsibility you must first take it—take responsibility for those aspects of your imprisonment that you as a group can control. If drugs are preventing the unity necessary to overcome the outrageous conditions of your existence, if they are causing you to cannibalize each other, then do something about that problem. And herein lays the basis of my criticism of gang leaders in my PF #28 editorial, when I said they are not looking out for the best interests of prisoners.

A page two article in the Seattle Times caught my eye this morning. It’s a story about “a racially sparked brawl” in yet another California prison, this one at Chino. Just where is this racial harmony of which you speak?]

PRISON FOCUS 22
BMU PUNISHES THOSE ALREADY PUNISHED

Dear Prison Focus:

I just received your Prison Focus #28. Under the headline, “What is going on at Pelican Bay” you inquire about the behavior modification unit (BMU). I can inform you that the BMU program further punishes prisoners after already serving their SHU terms.

First off, it’s double jeopardy, sometimes triple jeopardy. For example: After serving your SHU term, if you qualify you’ll be imposed an indeterminate SHU (6 months if disciplinary free) then placed in BMU for 90 days or 180, depending on if you can complete it in the 90 days. At times, you’ll have to serve months or years to get back to the general population.

Now if you are placed in BMU, you will have to send your appliance and personal clothing that you were allowed in the SHU home or donate it. This is further punishment not to mention it will result in having to pay twice to send property home. How is this not punishment? Thank you for your time.

Jesse Padilla, Tehachapi

SWEEPING CUTS IN NY PRISONS

Dear Prison Focus:

I’m glad to finally have a subscription to your magazine. Great prison-related articles from around the country. Also some amazing artwork. It’s also good to see Ed Mead still writing to make us all stop and think!

I’m curious to know if prisons around the country are going through the same stricter changes we here in NY maximum security prisons have been going through. Over the past couple of years we’ve had cutbacks in the amount of toiled paper we’re given. Some prisoners only get 1 roll per week which equals sometimes only three or four a month.

We’ve had our package room rules changed. What’s allowed in is very limited from what we were once allowed. Now many rules make no sense whatsoever. Hobby shops also continue to be eliminated throughout the state’s prisons. That means the use of class A tools (mostly leather tools) is forbidden.

My main concern lately has been the food they feed us. I’ve been in prison a little over six months now. I keep seeing items taken from our diets replaced with items of poorer quality. We no longer have grapefruit or grapefruit juice, or oranges. Most meats have been replaced with soy products. This is just to name a few. The quality is so poor in taste most of us try to avoid “mess hall” food and live out of a can from the commissary. This isn’t much better, and prices go up every two weeks!

We keep reading about the rising cost of healthcare in prisons. Surely our poor quality diets from the garbage we’re fed will lead to health problems in the near future. We can’t even order health foods because of the rules on what’s allowed in. (That’s if it can even be afforded.)

Chris Slavin, Green Haven Correctional Facility

JUVENILES RECEIVING LIFE BEHIND PRISON WALLS

Dear Prison Focus:

My name is Edgar Bautista. I am an eighteen-year-old prisoner who has been sentenced to one-hundred-and-six years to life, a sentence that at times keeps me up at night. It seems that the number of teens being sentenced to life is escalating as the years go by. If this crisis continues to grow there will be hundreds if not thousands of teens who will never get a chance to correct their wrongs.

Our mothers are suffering; the thought of having a piece of their lives taken from them forever is too much to bear. It is extremely unjust for us juveniles to be imprisoned for life. Everyone should have a fair opportunity to correct and learn from their mistakes, everyone including myself and other young teens that are going through this ordeal.

Edgar Bautista, North Kern State Prison

55% IS UNFAIR AND BURDENSOME

Dear Prison Focus:

Please allow me a small moment of your time to bring forth a very pressing matter here in California prisons. The issue is restitution. I am sure this is not the first time this has been brought to your attention but it is a very dire subject. CDCR is taking 55 percent of all funds being sent to us by our family, friends, and loved ones. It is not only creating a burden upon the incarcerated, but heavily upon our loved ones whose income is limited and the little they can send us as a gift is deducted 55 percent. In essence they are being fined and penalized as well.

Tommy Miller Jr, Pelican Bay

THE HIV IN PRISON COMMITTEE IS BACK

HIV is back!!!!!!! We are here to send you information on HIV/AIDS, HEP C and substance abuse. We are a group of volunteers that inform and help answer questions. We urge you to get educated and to be able to better advocate for yourself. We ask our women in prison to please also request information about your special health needs. California Prison Focus publishes a newsletter for you and the community that we’d love you to contribute to. Please contact us and we’ll forward a newsletter with any other requested information. There is discrimination and poor health care to those in prison. HIP and California Prison Focus invites you to volunteer and help to inform.
SOME GUIDELINES FOR CONTRIBUTIONS TO PRISON FOCUS

SOME SUGGESTIONS FOR SUBMISSIONS:

• Artwork or graphics

• Letters (250 words) Let us know if you want us to use your name or we will only publish your initials and city & state of residence. You can also specify “anonymous.”

• Short Articles (250-500 words) The same identification guidelines apply. Topics can be issue specific, or current news or information.

• Helpful resources with address and pertinent information.

• Larger articles are accepted but be aware—our space is limited.

Topics: PF topic of issue; current news; recent or pending legislation or policy; news from your institution; organizing efforts; books—basically anything related to the prison industrial complex as you see it. Individual legal cases are not usually printed.

Sorry, we cannot return your submissions unless a prior arrangement is made. Submissions are not guaranteed to be published and we generally cannot respond to your submissions because of the volume of mail we receive. PF welcomes all submissions (they will not be returned).

CPF’S MISSION STATEMENT

California Prison Focus fights to abolish the California prison system as we know it. We investigate and expose human rights abuses with the goal of ending long term isolation, medical neglect, and all forms of discrimination. We are community activists, prisoners, and their family members working to inspire the public to demand change.

SPECIAL THANKS

California Prison Focus extends its warm thank you to the Lynne and Dan Alper Fund for their generous contribution to the ongoing work of CPF.

PRISON FOCUS 2008

Prison Focus #31 will be our Black August issue. Please send your articles and artwork. Due date for submissions for the next issue is 5/30/08. If you have ideas for issue #32 send them in to us as well.

BUILDING THE MOVEMENT CAMPAIGN (AND UPDATING OUR DATABASE)

Thank you for sending names and addresses of family and friends that are supportive of our work to defend prisoners’ rights. All of these people should have received our last newsletter and will continue to receive them for a period of time. We also thank our anonymous donor for a significant contribution to CPF for this effort which is designed to help us build and unify our collective efforts to end torturous prison conditions—especially isolation—and put an end to the prison industrial complex. Please continue to send us names and addresses for this project.

Also, we have recently acquired a new program for keeping track of Prison Focus subscriptions that should be more effective and efficient. We apologize for any errors in the past and we’ll be sure to credit you with future issues. If you haven’t paid for an annual subscription lately and you know it’s time to renew, please do so. Our $5 rate for prisoners doesn’t cover the entire cost of receiving four issues, but together represents a significant sum that allows us to continue this fine publication.

Ron Ahnen, Database Manager

Other publications available from CPF:

• 602 Appeal Form Suggestions: $2