BLACK AUGUST

WE WILL NEVER FORGET!
LETTERS

SOLIDARITY FROM IOWA
Dear Prison Focus:

I recently read issue no. 29 issue and very much enjoyed the articles.

I am disabled—in a wheelchair—and constantly fighting for the wheelchair bound. It seems as though the CDCR, regarding prisoners in wheelchairs, thinks we should be happy with what they give us, whether it complies with the Americans With Disabilities Act (ADA) or not. I am angered to see able-bodied employees tell someone in a wheelchair there is nothing wrong with their housing (i.e. in a gym), hard-to-access lockers, beds too close together and poor bathroom facilities. Is anyone who is wheelchair bound and possibly an expert ADA advocate ever going to see the way we live?

While I support getting improved medical care, both mental and physical for all prisoners, those of us who have chronic medical conditions and are disabled are often overlooked. Why is that? Only recently has CDCR added prisoner work assignments to provide disabled people with assistance (pushing wheelchairs around). They forgot to train these helpers. There is no education supplied to the prison population about wheelchairs and people with disabilities in prison—instead, we are “in the way” or abused.

We seem to be fighting a never-ending battle and wonder when we are going to get some recognition for our growing numbers. We feel forgotten.

Kurt Jones, Pleasant Valley State Prison

DISABLED RIGHTS DON’T EXIST
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Kurt Jones, Pleasant Valley State Prison

WHITE RACISM NOT AKIN TO HISTORY
Dear Prison Focus:

I extend my cheers and applaud most of what you guys have to say, even though this letter calls into question some of what you espouse. It’s my view that prisoners, especially slammed SHU prisoners, should have an open forum to express themselves. So in the name of real transparency, I hope my words reach print and not the trash can.

I’ve always had the vibe when reading Prison Focus that the staff cohere with the Marxist theory of “no class” i.e. the human race. That theory is contrary to the realities on the ground in prison. As an avid reader of world history I find it alarming when periodicals glamorize Karl Marx, Mao Zedong and the like as voices of change and the downtrodden. Quack!!

I took issue with Ed Meads characterization of the white race in issue 29, winter 2007 “Ed’s Comments” on racism. I’d appreciate a minute, a real short crash course in history and the opportunity to rebut the false characterization of world history at least to how I read it. How about in China where Mao Zedong killed 30-40 million of his people? Or in Africa where Sudanese and Somalian rebels and government forces are killing defenseless [African] people by the hundreds of thousands with no end in sight by Africans.

Believe me, life is tough, and those in positions of power usually tread over people not in power. That there Ed is not a white thing but the greed in all men to want more.

I grew up in a working class neighborhood and learned early on whining will get you nowhere in life… neither will shifting blame onto others. People who succeed in life do so through sheer desire and determination…to say anything different is disingenuous.

Unsigned

LESLIE RESPONDS: Dear
Unsigned: Thank you for writing. We appreciate dialogue and feedback. CPF as an organization does not adhere to a specific “ism” even though some of the writing in Prison Focus emphasizes class consciousness or espouses communism. What we are trying to accomplish is three-fold: creating a space for people to write on imprisonment issues, informing prisoners and other people about issues related to incarceration (especially in California), and raising overall consciousness.

QUESTIONS FOR INTEGRATION
Dear Prison Focus:

Kern Valley State Prison has been conducting integrated housing eligibility interviews. Only two main questions are asked. One, “Have you ever been involved in a racial riot/incident while in CDCR,” and two, “Have you ever been accused of predatory sexual assault or been a victim thereof?”

These are the two questions asked of me and several other prisoners who were interviewed recently.

Tracy B. Washington,
Kern Valley State Prison

COMMENTS TO ED ON RACISM
Dear Prison Focus:

In the winter 2007 issue of Prison Focus no. 27 “Ed’s Comments” were as usual well written and enjoyable to read, except for his section “On Racism.” For several years now I’ve read and have had interesting correspondence and talks with folks in the far left about their political views. Ed’s section “On Racism” is typical of many on the left when it comes to the subject of racism. I have to ask, are white folks the only racists?

I can only speak on prison life here in New York, which it seems is very different than other prisons around the country. New York’s maximum security prisons have no white gangs running around preaching racism that I am aware of. Yet white male prisoners hear daily how “white men did this” “white men did that” “it’s all the white man’s fault.” Comments like this cause many white men to become angry, confused and not want to associate with many of the other races who preach this stuff.

Unsigned

Continued on page 29
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. Permission is granted to reprint original articles from Prison Focus as long as credit is noted to Prison Focus and California Prison Focus. Also, please send us a copy of publication in which the article appears.

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Subscribe to Prison Focus for $20 and receive four issues ($5 for prisoners and free to California SHU prisoners). Upon request, you may receive a free sample in the next bulk mailing. Back issues are $2 each (if available). For further information, phone (510) 836-7222 or fax (510) 836-7333.

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BLACK AUGUST: WORDS FROM THEN AND NOW

Summer greetings from Prison Focus. We hope you are well. In this issue we look back to the 1970s in order to reflect on today. Kiilu Nyasha, long-time activist and former Black Panther contributed the feature article titled: ‘Black August 2008.” She reminds us of George Jackson’s legacy and reminds us not to forget, and to struggle for the release of our political prisoners who remain incarcerated. In this section we also include current instructional pieces by our own Ed Mead (former political prisoner), and Yskari Yero Douglas who writes about unity. Chaka brings us up to speed on current tactics the U.S. government is hoping to use to control terror titled “George Jackson Warned Us.” We are reminded about the 100-plus political prisoners behind the walls today by Jan Laaman. And we hope you are inspired by the poem by Claude McKay first read in 1971.

Inside this edition we bring you writing from High Desert State Prison (California), the isolation units in Indiana and Pennsylvania, and from Texas, among other places. You will hear from prisoners about legal challenges, food issues, politics and isolation. From people on the outside you can read about the Stop Max conference in Pennsylvania, thoughts on the initiatives that have made and have not made the California ballot this fall, among other things. And we have reports from two of our committees: HIV and Hep-C and Litigation in Prison. Hope you enjoy. We await your feedback.

—Leslie DiBenedetto, Co-editor

BLACK AUGUST 2008

By Kiilu Nyasha

This is the 38th anniversary of Black August, first organized to honor our martyred freedom fighters, Jonathan and George Jackson, Khutari Gaulden, James McClain, William Christmas, and the sole survivor of the August 7,1970 Courthouse Slave Rebellion, Ruchell Cinque Magee. This is a time to embrace the principles of unity, self-sacrifice, political education, physical fitness and/or training in martial arts, resistance and revolution -- transforming ourselves into the new man, the new woman.

As Mumia Abu-Jamal noted, “August is a month of meaning, of repression and radical resistance, of injustice and divine justice; of repression and righteous rebellion; of individual and collective efforts to free the slaves and break the chains that bind us.”

Primarily, August is the month we recall the great loss exacted upon our Black revolutionary movement with the assassination of George Jackson and his younger brother, the teenaged Jonathan Jackson. Jonathan was martyred when he led the August 7 rebellion; George was martyred a year later on August 21, 1971.

I had the privilege and the good fortune of being in the right place at the right time to initiate a correspondence with George, and later, a one-hour visit in the holding cell of San Quentin. I’ve met no one before or since who was more dedicated to revolutionary change.

As you will note from some of the quotes below, George was a brilliant leader who set a righteous example of intellectual, physical growth and advanced development of consciousness.

Attorney Steve Bingham, tried and acquitted of all charges in the case resulting from the events of August 21, 1971, once told me that when prison staff cleaned out Jackson’s cell after he was killed, they found 99 books covering the history of the world. In fact, he had sent me a book list (I had a lot of catching up to do.), and told me he read some six dailies and several books a week, while doing 1,000 fingertip push-ups a day. He was in solitary confinement for most of his 11 years in prison for a $70 robbery when he was 18 years old.

Bingham noted in an interview, “It’s clear to me that his responsibility in bringing international attention to prison conditions in California brought on him the wrath of the California Department of Corrections. This, together with his designation as Field Marshal of the Black Panther Party, certainly put him in their cross hairs.”

Moreover, his two books, bestseller “Soledad Brother: The Prison Letters of George Jackson” and “Blood In My Eye,” completed just before his death were also factors.

As California prisons prepare to integrate double cells, beginning with Mule Creek in lone and Sierra Conservation Center (what a euphemism!) in Jamestown, Jackson’s words should be heeded:

“If there were any differences or grievances between us in the black colonies and the peoples of other colonies across the country, around the world, we should be willing to forget them in the desperate need for coordination against American fascism…. To destroy it will require cooperation and communion between our related parts; communion between colony and colony, nation and nation.”

Moreover, it’s important to bear in mind that “race” is a false construct, that our genetic map is 99.9 percent the same indicating one human race (having cultural, religious, national, political differences), and that all humans originated on the Mother continent of Africa.

From Blood in My Eye, George Jackson calls upon us to

“Settle your quarrels, come together, understand the reality of our situation, understand that fascism is already here, that people are dying who could be saved, that generations more will live poor butchered half-lives if you fail to act. Do what must be done; discover your humanity and your love in revolution.”

Given today’s harsh realities, the need to organize a revolutionary movement is greater than ever.

Today’s social and environmental problems are many times worse than they were 30 - 40 years ago and threatening to worsen. Economic disparities are greater than ever with one percent of the world’s population owning 80 percent of the wealth. Billions
of people are living on less than a dollar a day!

Food riots have broken out in Haiti, Bangladesh, Egypt and elsewhere as food prices soar along with the cost of fuel. And millions are going hungry right here in the belly of the beast.

The U.S. now has the highest rate of incarceration in the world – and rising. It currently has 2.4 million people locked up with seven million more on probation or parole.

California has the greatest number of prisoners and prisons – some 90 prisons, jails, and camps housing more than 170,000 men and women. – with a plan to add another 53,000 beds! And the cost is astronomical.

Add to this the lack of adequate health care, education and employment, proliferation of drugs and guns, homelessness, hunger and destitution, unjust imperialist wars, and climate-change disasters.

The result is the destruction of our families and communities, social isolation/ alienation, PTSD, drug addiction, child and spousal abuse, and violence turned inward as manifested in random, senseless killings of oppressed people by other oppressed people.

By the end of the 1970’s, the Black Panther Party was dissolved -- victim of the FBI’s notorious COINTELPRO that used every dirty trick in the book to destroy it, as well as its youthful lack of experience. Yet its impact upon the Black community, the nation and the world was immeasurable.

I still believe Comrade George was correct when he said, “withdrawal from the enemy state and its social, political and economic life is the first step toward its destruction.”

As George put it, “Fascism has temporarily succeeded under the guise of reform.”

Modern-day fascism is the combined dictatorship of big business and government, characterized by greed, militarism, racism, homophobia, and classism.

I think the fascist powers that be feel compelled to put a fresh face on fascism – a brown face.

We cannot be so naïve as to think that Democratic Party nominee Barack Obama has broken all records in campaign fundraising because he’s going to change things for you and me. Please. As Jamil al-Amin (H.Rap Brown) noted. “If voting could change things; they’d make it illegal.”

It should be obvious that Obama cannot and will not produce real change, like moving from capitalism to socialism, redistributing the wealth, abolishing the prison system per se, changing domestic and foreign policies.

George Jackson wrote: “When we participate is this election to win, instead of disrupt, we’re lending to its credibility, and destroying our own. With all the factors of control over the electoral process in the hands of the minority ruling class, the people’s party can always be made to seem isolated, unimportant, even extraneous…. All political parties, as things stand, will support the power complex.”

In conclusion, let’s honor this Black August by honoring the politics of our beloved Comrade brother, George Lester Jackson. Study his works and struggle to release political prisoners, especially his comrades, Hugo L.A. Pinell and Rachell Cinque Magee, doing their 44th and 45th year, respectively, in California gulags.

In closing, I ask you to send your love energies to our wounded warrior, Comrade Mjumbe Gazi, who is gravely ill with lung cancer, hospitalized in Oakland. His voice can be heard on “Black August Commemoration 2006,” a four-hour radio program produced by yours truly and archived at KPFA: http://www.kpfa.org.

THE ONE THIRD RULE

By Ed Mead

During the first American Revolution one third of the people supported the Crown (King George of England), one third of the people supported the cause of independence and revolution, and the last third could not have cared less one way or the other. Over and over again it has been my experience that this rule holds true not only in other examples of history, but also today.

When I was in the U.S. Penitentiary at Marion, there was an armed escape attempt by about six prisoners from the recreation yard at a time of day when it was full of prisoners. Two prisoners were in front of adjacent gun towers, and two more were in between the towers. The four fired their home-made single shot pistols at their respective towers and then all six of them hit the double fences. The gunfire did not put the tower guards down, however, and they immediately opened fire on the escaping prisoners. The prisoners, now under fire and struck in the razor wire between the two fences, surrendered; one receive a grazing head shot.

Sirens blared and the gruff sound of authority came through loud speakers on the yard, ordering all prisoners to immediately return to their cells. A third of the prisoners complied with the order and promptly returned to their cells as directed. Another third hovered near the door leading to the cellblocks but did not actually go inside.
The last third of us held our ground in a group, in the face of the goon squad and other assembled pigs. They ordered us inside. We refused, saying we would not go in until there was medical treatment on the scene for the wounded prisoner. From the safety of the crowd I timidly threw a small rock at the lieutenant barking the orders, others followed. The cops fell back and promptly got a medical crew out to attend the wounded prisoner. With the prisoner being treated, we went in as ordered. The point is that if you have a third of the population you have enough.

How do you get that third? By struggle in its many forms, but mostly through successful struggles. The object is to win. One way might be to more narrowly focus our meager resources—to aim more precisely. Let’s stop and think of who we are trying to reach and why.

When I think about who we are trying to reach I envision a pyramid that has been divided into three sections. First there is a little part at the very top of the pyramid. Then there is a larger middle portion of the pyramid, and finally a very large section at the base. In this representation the top piece would be the more politically advanced or more rights and class conscious elements of our target audience. The middle section would be the intermediate sectors. And the base would represent the more backwards elements. When we do our political work we should focus our energies on the more advanced elements, those at the top of the pyramid, who can in turn win over the intermediate segment. That intermediate strata will then in turn be able to win over or neutralize the more backward sectors of the prison population.

How does this pyramid scheme work in actual practice? First, individual prisoners should be reaching out to family members and to folks doing prisoner support work in their respective areas. Prisoners have not done as well in maintaining ties with progressive organizations on the outside. Articles on prison events and conditions should be written and sent to the publications of these outside groups, not to the bourgeois media outlets who always support the status quo. We are not going to be able to reach those backward elements; we will leave the bulk of that task to the intermediate sector.

Our objective should be to make the backward prisoners more rights conscious, and the rights conscious prisoners more class conscious. ↔

GEORGE JACKSON WARNED US

By Chaka

The Violent Radicalization and Homegrown Terrorism Prevention Act passed overwhelmingly in the House of Representative on Oct. 23, 2007*. I hope I have your full attention.

Years ago in Blood in My Eye, George Jackson wrote: “Death and prison for all who object - fascism in its final and secure state. It has happened here.” It has been happening here.

To understand what Comrade George was saying we have to rely less on establishment academics as to what fascism means. Most of them understand fascism as something that happened in Europe during the 1930s. George tried to improve our understanding of fascism by daring to look beyond continental Europe. He recognized U.S. fascism by locating it in the history of genocidal extermination of indigenous peoples and genocidal enslavement of Afrikans. George also recognized that fascism continued into the present because he did not separate white supremacy from its logical conclusion: genocide. Witness the attempts to destroy public housing in New Orleans as homelessness increases dramatically.

U.S. concentration camps - prisons and jails - are sites of terror and warfare. To some it seems undeclared, but the over 2 million people imprisoned reveals high-intensity, racialized and class-based warfare. Critically, this war against us is also highly gendered. While Afrikan men are the vast majority of those incarcerated, Afrikan women are currently being incarcerated at higher rates. The incredibly disproportionate number of Afrikans and other racialized people in the U.S. gulags should make clear our deadly reality. The recent ruling by the Supreme Court that asserts the right of federal judges to sentence individuals below the guideline recommendations in crack cocaine cases and the decision by the Sentencing Commission to apply that ruling retroactively, should be a reminder of how much work we have left such as the mandatory minimum terms imposed by Congress along with their devastating impact on our communities. Mass incarceration remains not only a means of social control for populations rendered surplus by changes in the global and U.S. capitalist economy – it is genocidal.

On the frontlines trying to halt genocide were/are our freedom fighters. Some of them organized themselves under the banner of the Black Panther Party and the Black Liberation Army, and others were/are part of other revolutionary formations and collectives. What they shared in common was a willingness to up the ante of struggle as the apparatus of U.S. state terrorism intensified their brutality. Confronted with overwhelming state violence, often in the form of police assassinations, they resisted. And those who dared to struggle have paid, are still paying, with their lives.

Today, our freedom fighter - Assata Shakur - remains in exile. The terror mongers have placed a $1 million bounty on her head. Others also remain exiled, suffering separation from loved ones, yet giving us hope, as they avoid direct repression. But many of our freedom fighters - Jalil Muntaqim, Herman Bell, Robert (Seth) Hayes, Mutulu Shakur, Sekou Odinga, Field Marshall Eddie Conway, Leonard Peltier, Sundiata Acoli, Marilyn Buck, Mumia Abu Jamal and many others - remain incarcerated. They are political prisoners and prisoners of war, individuals who remain caged because they fought and continue to fight.

In these times of global apartheid, “disaster capitalism,” and intensifying white supremacist violence we should call upon the spirit of George Jackson to possess us. “As a slave, the social phenomenon that engages my whole consciousness is, of course, revolution,” Comrade George stated boldly. This is what made him so terrifying to the ruling class. The pressing task we face today is to transform the social phenomenon that engages our whole consciousness. Intensifying our struggle to emancipate all our political prisoners and prisoners of war and to permanently dismantle the prison industrial complex is a crucial aspect of this work.

Emancipating our freedom fighters is no easy task. The governing people refuse to recognize them as political prisoners and prisoners of war and have kept them locked up for decades. Those that run the criminal injustice system continue to criminalize organizing for social justice and prevent resistance to political and social repression.

It is from this vantage point we must resist the “legalization” of The Violent Radicalization and Homegrown Terrorism Prevention Act. As the Center for Constitutional Rights has pointed out this legislation is so broad and sweeping that it can
easily be used as a tool for state repression. Guantanamo and Abu Ghraib, kidnappings (extraordinary renditions), illegal wire tapping, and the legalization of torture (e.g. water boarding) all reveal that the legal framework for increased repression is being rapidly expanded.

Recently we witnessed the renewed attacks on the members (past) of the Black Panther Party and the BPP’s legacy of resistance to empire. The San Francisco 8 case reveals there is no action too reprehensible for the forces of repression. Even though a Los Angeles judge, in 1975, dismissed a case brought against some Black Panther Party members because police had systematically tortured BPP member Harold Taylor, the police have re-opened this more than 30-year-old case against Taylor and other activists. The struggle to end this specific attack continues.

If Comrade George was correct in noting that the “fascist state has found it essential to disguise the opulence of its ruling-class leisure existence by providing the lower classes with a mass consumer’s flea market of its own,” the capacity to participate in this “flea market” is shrinking for the lower and middle classes as wealth inequality increases. 

Source: www.blackagendareport.com. Submitted by Freedom Archives, 522 Valencia Street, S.F., CA 94110

[Editor’s Note: As of May, the Senate has not passed the act. Here is more information on the subject provided by http://dandelionsalad.wordpress.com: In the wake of Senator Joseph Lieberman (I-CT) and Susan Collins’ (R-ME) alarmist report, “Violent Islamist Extremism, the Internet, and the Homegrown Terrorism Threat,” the Senate may be moving towards passage of the Orwellian “Violent Radicalization and Homegrown Terrorism Prevention Act of 2007” (S. 1959). A companion piece of legislative flotsam to the House bill, “The Violent Radicalization and Homegrown Terrorism Prevention Act of 2007” (H.R. 1955), the Democrat-controlled Congress seems ready to jettison Constitutional guarantees of free speech and assembly. The bill passed the House by a 404-6 vote in October. Twenty-three congress members abstained, including House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and House Judiciary Chairman John Conyers. Under cover of studying “violent radicalization,” both bills would broaden the already-fluid definition of “terrorism” to encompass political activity and protest by dissident groups, effectively criminalizing civil disobedience and non-violent direct action by developing policies for “prevention, disruption and mitigation.” Call it COINTELPRO 2.0. Crafted by former House Intelligence Committee Chairwoman Jane Harman (D-CA), the legislation would create a domestic commission, a university-based “Center of Excellence” that would study and then, target domestic “radicalization” as a “threat” to the “homeland.”

UNTITLED

If we must die let it not be like hogs,
Hunted and pinned in an inglorious spot,
While around us bark the mad and hungry dogs
Making their mock at our accursed lot;
If we must die then let us nobly die,
So that our precious blood may not be shed in vain.
Then even the monsters we defy
Shall be constrained
To honor us though dead.
We kinsmen must meet the common foe,
Though for outnumbered, let us show us brave,
And for their thousand blows,
Deal one death blow.
What though before us lies the open grave,
Like men we’ll face the murderous pack,
Pressed to the wall, dying,
But fighting back.

-Claude McKay
Poem Read at the Revolutionary Memorial Services for George Jackson, Field Marshal, Black Panther Party, held at St. Augustine’s Episcopal Church in Oakland, California on August 28, 1971.

POLITICAL PRISONERS IN THE UNITED STATES

By Jaan Laaman

There are about 100 political prisoners in various prisons across the United States. These women and men are listed and recognized as political prisoners by numerous human rights, legal defense and progressive/socialist organizations. These people all come from the Civil Rights/Black Power/New African Liberation struggles, the Puerto Rican Independence Movement, Indigenous Peoples survival struggles, Chicano/Mexico Movements, anti-imperialist/anti-war movements, anti-racist/anti-fascist struggles, the Women’s Movement, social and economic justice struggles, and especially in the past several years, from the Environmental/Animal Rights movement. They are Black, white, Latino and Native American. Most of these political prisoners have been in captivity since the 1970s and 1980s. Some were convicted on totally fabricated charges, others for nebulous political conspiracies or for acts of resistance. All received huge sentences for their political beliefs or actions in support of these beliefs.

Additionally, there are many thousands of revolutionary-minded, politically-conscious prisoners in U.S. jails. These are people who became more politically aware and active once they landed in prison. A lot of these prisoners also get singled out for extra harsh and restrictive treatment like the political prisoners. Since 9/11, the U.S. has also imprisoned thousands of Arab and Muslim visitors to this country, as well as some Islamic citizens and residents.

The U.S. government likes to deny that it holds political prisoners. The harsh punitive conditions of confinement, often in special “control unit type” prisons, that political prisoners face day in, day out, decade after decade, exposes and refutes this government myth. Not only does America hold political prisoners, but they are being held under longer sentences than any kind of prisoners, anywhere in the world. Despite this, these women and men remain committed to their communities, movements, and principles. As best they can, through their voices and very lives, they continue to uphold the politics of justice, equality and liberation, especially for the poor and working class people throughout the world. Political prisoners in the United States want and need your awareness and support. 

—Jaan Laaman

The following are organizations that do support work for political prisoners:

Jericho Movement, P.O. Box 650, New York, NY 10009; Partisan Defense Committee, P.O. Box 99 Canal Street Sta, New York, NY 10013; ABC Federation, P.O. Box 11223, Whittier, CA.

“We as revolutionaries will work on turning every prison into a university and every cell into a classroom. We must educate to liberate. All power to the people.”

—Ali Shakka,

www.4strugglemag.org
QUOTE BOX

For what is the crime of burglarizing a bank, compared with the crime of building one?”

Bertolt Brecht

“We’re not a democracy. It’s a terrible misunderstanding and a slander to the idea of democracy to call us that. In reality, we’re a plutocracy: a government by the wealthy.”

Ramsey Clark, former U.S. Attorney General

“Of all forms of tyranny the least attractive and the most vulgar is the tyranny of mere wealth, the tyranny of plutocracy”

John Pierpont Morgan

“I hope we shall crush in its birth the aristocracy of our moneied corporations, which dare already to challenge our government to a trial of strength and bid defiance to the laws of our country.”

Thomas Jefferson

“I see in the near future a crisis approaching that unnerves me and causes me to tremble for the safety of my country. As a result of the war, corporations have been enthroned and an era of corruption in high places will follow, and the money power of the country will endeavour to prolong its reign by working upon the prejudices of the people until all wealth is aggregated in a few hands and the Republic is destroyed.”

Abraham Lincoln

“The real truth of the matter is, as you and I know, that a financial element in the large centers has owned the government of the U.S. since the days of Andrew Jackson.”

Franklin D. Roosevelt

“Fascism should more appropriately be called Corporatism because it is a merger of State and corporate power.”

Benito Mussolini

The Roots of Violence: Wealth without work, Pleasure without conscience, Knowledge without character, Commerce without morality, Science without humanity, Worship without sacrifice, Politics without principles:

Mahatma Gandhi: Indian leader, 1869-1948

“When shall it be said in any country of the world, my poor are happy, neither ignorance or distress is to be found among them; my jails are empty of prisoners, my streets of beggars; the aged are not in want, the taxes not oppressive; the rational world is my friend because I am friend of its happiness. When these things can be said, then may that country boast of its constitution and government.”

Thomas Paine

“It is never right to do wrong or to requite wrong with wrong, or when we suffer evil to defend ourselves by doing evil in return.”

Socrates 469 - 399 BC

“The civility of no race can be perfect whilst another race is degraded. It is a doctrine alike of the oldest and of the newest philosophy, that man is one, and that you cannot injure any member, without a sympathetic injury to all the members”

Ralph Waldo Emerson. 1844

AMERICA’S GULAG JUST KEEPS GROWING

By Ethan Nadelmann

W e’re No. 1! We’re No. 1! The New York Times’ Adam Liptak wrote a disturbing front-page story on Wednesday about how the United States dwarfs the rest of the world when it comes to locking up its citizens. The United States has less than 5 percent of the world’s population, but a quarter of the world’s prisoners. There are now 2.3 million people behind bars in the United States. According to the Justice Department’s Bureau of Justice Statistics’ most recent report, the number of people incarcerated in U.S. prisons and jails jumped by more than 60,000 in the year ending June 30, 2006. That jump represents the largest increase since 2000.

The United States continues to rank first among all nations in both total prison/jail population and per capita incarceration rates. The United States has held first place for decades, followed by China (with more than four times our population) at 1.6 million and Russia at 885,670, according to the International Centre for Prison Studies at King’s College in London.

America’s prison population explosion is fed in good part by the failed drug war policies of the past 30-plus years. Back in

Continued on page 11
HIP COMMITTEE VISITS CCWF

The HIV and HCV in Prison Committee is trying to get back to CCWF on a regular basis, working alongside the women inside to provide up-to-date health news and treatment information and advocate for people experiencing medical neglect or abuse. Andrea and Georgia made a small trip to CCWF on a Saturday in May. We met with eight women, including activist and health advocate Beverly Henry. All were staying strong despite constant indignities by the staff or other prisoners and the often frightening and inconsistent medical treatment.

Many of the women we spoke to are living with long-term, life threatening illnesses and have to fight to get basic care. Many of them have seen other women die, becoming intimately knowledgeable about the dying process. Out of only eight interviews that day, we heard at least two accounts of people witnessing mortally ill women being told by nursing staff that their conditions were minor -- with deadly consequences. How horrible to see others suffer and die, and wonder if you might be next!

Continuing problems include very sick people not getting prompt medical appointments; routine doctor visits done via satellite, which means the doctor can’t actually closely examine any problems; pain medications abruptly discontinued; and patient confidentiality disrespected.

If someone has HIV, it should be protected information. Yet the way pill call is announced, word gets around about why people need medicine. Ignorant staff and other prisoners disrespect those who should have never had to worry about their information getting out.

As part of the HIP Project we answer mail from prisoners who need resource information or health information about HIV and HCV. Please write to us at CPF (Attn: HIP). If you are at CCWF and you or someone you know may want to help us gather information about human rights abuses in the form of medical neglect and malpractice, drop us a line, and we may be able to interview you in person.

To end this article on a good note, we sincerely enjoyed meeting everyone that day. We encourage all women who read this to help us get more articles, art and poetry into the Prison Focus by and about women, so send us submissions c/o Prison Focus newsletter. Also, it should be mentioned that almost every woman we spoke to had good things to say about one doctor at CCWF, Dr. Mahoney. She is known to be respectful and knowledgeable. She apparently listens to patients and includes them in the process of creating their treatment plans by considering their wishes and input. She explains things well and makes the women feel like she cares about their well-being. So, kudos goes out to Dr. Mahoney for decency!

BITTERSWEET BESTOWAL

By Henry Hill

I was both saddened and pleased about Ms. Rubach’s departure. She definitely deserved her retirement. Mary was both an inspiration and a guide to me. But even more so, I saw her as a friend.

I will never forget this anger management essay she sent me in response to a letter I’d sent her concerning my views of the mistreatment of women in prison. I speak how I feel, and it tends to get pretty heavy depending on the subject. She didn’t deter me from feeling that way, but wanted to suggest a healthier way of approaching it. I will always love her for that insight and memory. She also directed me to the CCWP of which I’ve become a supporter. I doubt if I’ve ever told them as to how I came to know them. They can definitely thank her for whatever positive I do on their behalf.

Ms. Rubach understood my passion for change and compassion for those who are unable to bring it about. She made me look at my circumstances in a way not seen before. Because of her, I realize that we’re not a forgotten people behind these walls, that we don’t have to tolerate the degradations and injustices we suffer on a daily basis. She made me not only believe in people more, but in myself as well. This, and so much more will I take from our brief, but forever lasting encounter.

So wherever you are Ms. Rubach, whatever it is you may be doing, rest easy knowing you made a difference. Know that great things will come because of your existence. In all sincerity do I thank you. In pure love will I ever speak your name. As-Salaam Alaikum.

TRIBUTE TO MARY

By Mortae Henderson

Thank you Mary, for all that you have given, so unselfishly, to those that many in society have turned their backs on. You have been a blessing from God to us desolate souls, inspiring many of us to make a change in our lives for the better. May life always be beautiful for you, not only for your humanitarian work you’ve contributed to the world, but for the extraordinary woman that you are. You’re truly going to be missed, but never forgotten and eternally loved by us all.
Tackle Page 10

THE BMU FIGHT

The Behavioral Modification Unit (BMU) is illegal. Period. Its existence at High Desert (HDSP) and Pelican Bay (PBSP) violates both the letter of the law upon which it initially operated, as well as amendments Five and Six of the Constitution. It currently operates only because we allow it to. We do this in two ways: first, by refusing to take the initiative to educate ourselves about the program, we remain ignorant of its illegality; and second, by participating in the program itself, we give in our sanction.

A little history. On Nov. 20, 2005, the BMU began operation at HDSP under the auspices of Admin. Bulletin 05/02 (A.B. 05/02). It was to operate as a ‘pilot program’ in accordance with P.C. 5058.1. Sub-sections (a) and (d) of P.C. 5058.1 state:

“(a) For the purposes of this sections, ‘Pilot Program’ means a program implemented on a temporary and limited basis in order to test and evaluate the effectiveness of the program, develop new techniques, or gather information.”

“(d) A regulation adopted pursuant to this section is repealed by operation of the law, and the amendment is reversed by operation of the law, two years after the commencement of the pilot program being implemented, unless the adoption, amendment, or director pursuant to Chapter 3.5 (Commencing with section 11340) of Part 1 of Division 3 of Title 2 of the Government Code....”

This legal requirement was articulated in A.B. 05/02 (which is now nearly impossible to get a copy of). In September 2006, PBSP began to operate a BMU under the auspices of Operational procedure 225; this O.P. in an adjunct of A.B. 05/02, and as such has no independent authority of its own. On November 2007, the operation of a BMU anywhere in the C.D.C.R. became illegal unless promulgated into law in accordance with P.C. 5058.1(d) and the Administrative Procedures Act (Gov. Code sec. 11340 et. seq.); it was not promulgated, not then and not since then. It now operates as an ‘underground regulation’ and is illegal no matter how they try to justify it. These are the objective facts.

On a more subjective level it can be argued that the BMU violates the constitutional protection against double jeopardy (5th Amendment) and the right to due process (14th Amendment), but the validity of such arguments depends on the case in question. Prisoners being released from the SHU and sent directly to BMU have an excellent double jeopardy claim and a potential due process claim; the BMU is a disciplinary program with fewer privileges than the SHU—kick-out in such a program amounts to double jeopardy, and lacking a new disciplinary infraction due process also becomes an issue. For those in general population, being placed in BMU without a disciplinary infraction, you have the potential due process claim. And, of course, the preceding paragraph applies to everyone.

**Prisoners being released from the SHU and sent directly to BMU have an excellent double jeopardy claim and a potential due process claim**

Personally, I’ve been fighting this since I learned of it. I went to ICC on October 10, 2007, to be evaluated for release from the SHU, my fight began there, first verbally (I had done my research) and then with a 602. I was released from the SHU in November 2007, and placed in the BMU seven (7) days after the program began operation as an ‘underground regulation.’ I’m no longer in the BMU but I’m still fighting it. I’ve exhausted administrative remedies, and in June I submitted a writ of habeas corpus with the Del Norte Superior Court. I plan to take this all the way. I have provided you with the info. You need to combat this injustice. Feel free to join the fight.

—Skinhead Grinch

WHAT LOOMS AHEAD

By Charles Carbone, Esq.

The future is certain. It will reflect the choices we are making right now. For prisons, the policy choices we are making are unmistakably clear and undeniably wrong. Here are some of the lowlights on the choices that lay before us.

**RUNNER’S LAW**

Set to appear on the November 2008 ballot, this initiative is brought to us by the same financial and political interests that gave us California’s Three Strikes. In this proposed state law, the leading proponents are the various Sheriff departments throughout the state. Here’s why: the bill would make several major changes including a guarantee of nearly half a billion dollars annually to law enforcement for more policing and prosecution operations aimed mainly at our youth and at communities of color. Using fear mongering regarding gang violence, the bill dedicates half a billion dollars to increased prosecutions against young people allegedly in gangs. The bill doubles and triples sentences for youthful gang offenders while also ensuring that juveniles will be tried increasingly as adults.

The bill is so regressive that even in Los Angeles County, where the gang problem is arguably the worst in the country, the board of supervisors expressed their opposition to the initiative in a 9 to 1 vote. But in a public debate that relies on scare tactics around crime policy, the public will have to mobilize to defeat this initiative that follows the same broken model of over-incarceration as a “solution” to crime.

**MARSY’S LAW**

If Runner’s law wasn’t bad enough, voters in November 2008 will decide on another flawed initiative. This one – called Marsy’s law – was written by the family of a murder victim, who was a UC Santa Barbara student. After her murder, the family’s grief was rubbed raw by feeling left out of the prosecution process, and then later the parole hearing process. Stemming from their rage over the prospect that their daughter’s killer could be released, the family wrote “Marsy’s Law” which if enacted would effectively foreclose any possibility of inmates serving life sentences from obtaining a parole date. The minimum parole denial would change from one to three years with parole commissioners empowered to issue up to a 15 year parole denial.
NO FUNDING FOR MEDICAL CARE UNITS

The federal receiver over the medical care in CDCR recently asked for nearly 7 billion dollars of state funds to build prison medical facilities in the state which would house literally 10,000 ailing prisoners. Given a massive state budget gap, legislators are naturally resistant to a multi-billion dollar expenditure on prisons. The receiver has threatened to seek a federal judicial order mandating the funds if the legislature doesn’t act. The governor’s response thus far has been to threaten floating new state bonds to cover the costs.

NO CAPS ON PRISON POPULATION

Despite all their threats, the federal three-judge panel convened to consider capping the prison population is poised to approve a settlement which does nothing to curb the severe over-crowding in California’s prisons other than to mildly stop the revolving door for parolees who at any time comprise 30-40 thousand prisoners who are returned to custody on insignificant parole violations such as absconding or testing positive for drugs; so much for any radical change or fundamental overhaul of the prisons. This settlement appears even more certain now that a California Court of Appeals has approved the out-of-state transfer of thousands of California inmates to Tennessee and Louisiana where they are imprisoned in facilities run by private prisons.

NO POLITICAL WILL TO FIX PRISON CRISIS

The prison crisis is not suffering from a lack of good fixes. It is suffering from a lack of political will to implement those changes. The list of good ideas includes sentencing reform, early release, alternatives to incarceration, restorative justice models, incentive-based rehabilitative programming, a real parole process for life prisoners, and the release of aging prisoners. Despite these great ideas which would advance both the goals of public safety and reducing the prison population, there is no movement to implement. Without the proper political support, these ideas continue to go nowhere. Like four other states in the U.S., California continues to pursue a flawed correctional and criminal justice policy that now spends more on prisons than higher education.

AB 900

The governor and legislature’s fix to the prison crisis – AB 900 – continues to inch forward. This bill is perhaps the exemplar of why the state’s prison “experiment” is so flawed. Under the rhetoric of reform, the state’s solution to prison over-crowding is to build more prisons (40,000 new beds in state prisons, 16,000 “secure re-entry beds,” 16,000 infill beds, and 8,000 medical beds) at the cost of nearly $10 billion dollars. Although hiccups in the building and permitting of the prisons have slowed down the effort, ground has been broken to build even more prisons in the state. If history is any indication, once these prisons are built, California will fill and overfill them with more and more of out loved ones.

DEATH PENALTY REACTIVATED

With the recent U.S. Supreme Court decision deeming lethal injection constitutional, like many other states, California’s killing machine will resume with executions back on track at San Quentin. We know that the innocent and guilty will perish in state sanctioned murder.

NO PUBLIC DEBATE

Despite having the largest prison population in the world and California with the largest population of that staggering figure, the public debate is largely silent on the cost of this unprecedented experiment on humanity. And worse, even with Obama’s promise and charm, no major presidential candidate is taking on these tough issues with real solutions. The presidential elections are not providing room for a debate on the actual issues of crime and justice in America.

This future is here now if we fail to do what we can to change course. This means charting a new course for prisoners, their families and our communities. Doing so requires each one of us to step out of our comfort zone and challenge this broken system. Let’s do it. ➔

Gulag ................... Continued from page 8

1980, around 50,000 people were incarcerated for drug law violations. The total is now roughly 500,000. And this number does not even include hundreds of thousands of parolees and probationers who are incarcerated for technical violations, such as a drug relapse, nor does it include non-drug offenses committed under the influence of drugs, or to support a drug habit, or crimes of violence committed by drug sellers.

The Liptak piece describes criminologists and legal scholars in other industrialized countries as being mystified and appalled by the number of Americans incarcerated and length of the prison sentences. “The U.S. pursues the war on drugs with an ignorant fanaticism,” said Vivian Stern, a research fellow at the Centre for Prison Studies at King’s College in London. In the past Europeans came to America to study the prison system, but now they look at U.S. policies to see what not to do.

Two powerful forces are at play today. On the one hand, public opinion strongly supports alternatives to incarceration for non-violent and especially low-level drug law violators—and state legislatures around the country are beginning to follow suit. The paramount example to date is Prop. 36, the Californian “treatment instead of incarceration” ballot initiative in 2000 that won with 61 percent of the vote notwithstanding the opposition of political and law enforcement officials. On the other hand, the prison-industrial complex has become a powerful force in American society, able to make the most of the political inertia that sustains knee-jerk, lock-'em-up policies. There are some prosecutors quoted in the Times story who try to spin the draconian sentences as the byproduct of democracy: that elected officials are just responding to their constituents’ desire to lock up the bad guys and throw away the keys. There’s no doubt some truth in this, but far more insidious is how many politicians exploit fears about drugs to make themselves look “tough on crime.” Voters should be outraged that their tax money continues to be wasted on failed drug war policies. It’s time for a change.

Despite hundreds of billions of dollars spent and millions of Americans incarcerated, illegal drugs remain cheap, potent and widely available in every community; and the harms associated with them—addiction, overdose, and the spread of HIV/AIDS and

Continued on page 14
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The Jurist, June 10, 2008

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www.californiaprogressreport.com,
May 18, 2008

WILL BPH AND GOV ADHERE TO
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In 2007, Gov. Schwarzenegger signed
into law a provision that allows a person
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CDCR is resisting the change. In possibly
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tor of CDCR recently denied a petition by
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His reasons for the denial puts into ques-
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PRISON REFORM ACT MUST BE
FIXED
The House Judiciary’s Subcommittee
on Crime, Terrorism, and Homeland Se-
curity is scheduled to examine reform of
the Prison Litigation Reform Act (PLRA),
which was originally passed by Congress
in 1996 as a way to stem the tide against
what were thought to be frivolous lawsuits
by prisoners. Since that time, the law has
been used repeatedly to deny justice to vic-
tims of rape, assault, religious rights viola-
tions and other serious abuses. “PLRA was
passed to reduce frivolous lawsuits, not
meritorious ones,” said ACLU Legislative
Counsel Jesselyn McCurdy. “People who
have had their rights violated, including
rape victims, have been deprived of having
their constitutional claims heard in court,”
she said. “There are two kinds of walls in
American prisons: one that keeps prisoners
from escaping, and another that keeps the
abuse that happens inside from ever reaching
the light of day,” said McCurdy. “The Prison
Litigation Reform Act creates pris-
ons within prisons, except with paperwork
instead of locks and administrative hurdles
instead of bars.
The PLRA gave a blank check to guards
and corrections officers, and it’s time for
the prison system to pay the piper. Jody
Kent, public policy coordinator of the
ACLU’s National Prison Project (NPP) ex-
plained that “Prisoners are often required
to give their paperwork to the very guards
who have abused them, leading to intimi-
dation, more abuse and a culture where
prisoners stop filing complaints because of
the consequences – ultimately making life
in prison worse.” In some cases prison of-
ficials have taken advantage of the law’s
rigid standards by distributing the wrong
paperwork or telling prisoners the status of
their claims only after important deadlines
have passed.

http://www.aclu.org/prison,
April 22, 2008

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it from California’s already cash-strapped budget. Kelso said he’ll downsize the plan if possible. In the meantime he said, “I can no longer stand idly by while the state continues its pattern of prevarication.” Democrats predict that as a result of Republicans rejection of the bill may very well lead to early release of prisoners and a gaping new budget hole.


CA GOP REJECT SETTLEMENT DRAFT

Details of the draft have not been made public but Republican lawmakers are concerned about the draft settlement on prison overcrowding. Sen. George Runner has expressed serious concern over the possibility of early release for prisoners. In addition Republican lawmakers felt they had to shoot down Senate Bill 1665 because it was only a partial solution to fixing California’s prison overcrowding problem. They said they want fixes made to last years.


PRISON TRANSFERS ILLEGAL?

Three judges in the 3rd district court of appeals will issue a ruling within 90days concerning out-of-state transfers initiated by Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger. The governor insisted he acted in the best interest of California when he transferred several thousand prisoners to out of state prisons. Atty. Thomas Patton, representing the state of California in this case backs Schwarzenegger up, stating that the Governor was within his right to invoke special powers that he has under California’s Emergency Services Act and send those prisoners out of state.

On the other hand, Atttys. Greg Adam and Art Scotland do not agree. According to Scotland, the governor ignored some of the language set forth in the ESA that limits when the governor can invoke it. According to Atty. Adams, “the legislature set out a simple set of criteria that must be followed and the governor did not do it.” If the judges rule against the Governor’s decision, it is likely out of state prisoners will have to be returned.

KPCC, May 27, 2008

INVESTIGATION OF OUT-OF-STATE DEATHS

The federal court-appointed receiver for California’s prison healthcare system is investigating the deaths of four prisoners, who were transferred to out-of-state facilities. His concern is heightened because the CDCR is presently engaged in selectively shipping 8,500 foreign national prisoners to privately-run facilities.

Former court-appointed Receiver Robert Sillen, called three of the four out-of-state prisoner deaths “not quite natural.” He said his staff was reviewing the prisoner’s medical files to determine if their deaths were preventable. The prisoners died in Nevada, Arizona, Tennessee and an undisclosed location under the federal witness protection program.

It is not clear whether prisoners transferred out-of-state due to overcrowding, which are typically housed at private facilities, are covered under the protections of the Plata v. Schwarzenegger prison healthcare receivership. If they are, that might create a conflicting two-tier program for healthcare delivery: the profit-driven substandard care typical of private prisons and the federal constitution- dictated standard of care provided under the receiver. Recently-enacted California Penal Code § 11191(4) expressly provides that prisoners with serious physical or mental illnesses may be excluded from involuntary transfers if their condition qualifies. More than 400 of the planned 8,500 foreign nationals have already been shipped to other states as of September 2007.


RACIAL INTEGRATION IN CALIFORNIA PRISON

San Quentin and approximately 30 other state penal facilities are gearing up to carry out a federal court mediation agreement for integrating double cells. A 1995 lawsuit filed by a black California inmate, Garrison Johnson, said that the California Department of Corrections’ practice of segregating prisoners by race violated his rights. A 2005 ruling by the U.S. Supreme Court led to federal court mediation and the agreement that double cells would be desegregated. While most prisoners and correctional officials agree that it is a noble idea, many fear the worst. However, experts say it can work. The Texas prison system integrated its cells in the early 1990s and eventually saw a decline in racial tensions, said Professor Jim Marquart, chair of the criminology department at the University of Texas at Dallas. He said there was a spike in interracial violence at first, but after a while it died down.


NORA QUALIFIES FOR NOVEMBER BALLOT

Secretary of State Debra Bowen certified the non-violent offenders sentencing parole and rehabilitation initiative (NORA) for the November ballot. This statute requires the state to expand and increase funding and oversight for individualized treatment and rehabilitation programs for nonviolent drug offenders and parolees. It will reduce criminal consequences of nonviolent drug offenses by mandating three-tiered probation with treatment and by providing for case dismissal and/or sealing of records after probation, and will limit the court’s authority to incarcerate offenders who violate probation or parole. NORA will create numerous divisions, boards, commissions, and reporting requirements regarding drug treatment and rehabilitation.

FAMILY BATTLES SILENCE

The sister of a man killed in a Florence penitentiary riot says officials haven’t answered her questions.

“I was told he was stabbed,” Williams said. “In a way, it (the information) came from the prison and in a way it didn’t, if you know what I mean. So I called the prison, and they said they had to autopsy the body. I asked why an autopsy when they knew he had been stabbed. They never told me he had been shot. Then I talked to someone in the chapel, and he said a group of black inmates were told to lie down. My brother didn’t, so they shot him in the chest with a shotgun.” Hooker was black.

A white inmate, Brian Kubik, also was killed in the fight, was allegedly shot in the chest by guards. Kubik’s family says it has the same unanswered questions.


FORMER GUARD GETS PROBATION IN PRISONER DEATH

A former prison guard charged in the death of a prisoner whose head was slammed against a wall, pleaded no contest to manslaughter and was given the minimum sentence.

Jose Rodriguez Jr., 28, originally faced a 99-year sentence on a murder charge that prosecutors reduced to manslaughter, the Plainview Daily Herald reported. After Rodriguez pleaded no contest, a jury gave him two years’ probation and no fine on a second-degree felony charge that carried maximum punishments of 20 years in prison and a $10,000 fine.
Rodriguez was accused of slamming 52-year-old Paul Ray Judia’s head into a cell wall and Judia died at a hospital three days after the incident. He was a transfer prisoner serving a 10-year sentence for burglary.

C/OS INVESTIGATED FOR SETTING UP

Five Orange County, FL jail corrections officers are under criminal investigation for staging fights between prisoners.

A criminal and internal investigation opened after another corrections officer reported the incident. Sources said corrections officers organized the fights. Investigators were trying to figure out if any bets were made during the fights. One man said his son was beaten during one of the alleged fights.

“They were the ultimate fights. Go in a cell for three minutes and then in some cases four people. Two on two, but it ended up being three on one,” he said.

The five corrections officers have been moved to desk duty while the investigation is conducted.

wftv.com, May 2008

‘CREATIVE’ INFORMING: TURNING IN NEIGHBORS TO MAKE A BUCK

By Paul Joseph Watson

Southwest Florida Crime Stoppers and the *The New York Times* are heartily celebrating the fact that an increasing number of Americans are becoming informants and turning in their neighbors and family members to the authorities in return for cash rewards.

Citing gas prices, foreclosure rates and runaway food price inflation, The Times lauds the fact that citizens are reporting on each other, ensuring “a substantial increase in Crime Stopper-related arrests and recovered property, as callers turn in neighbors, grandchildren or former boyfriends in exchange for a little cash.”

The fact that people turning in their own neighbors and family members for payoffs is one of the hallmarks of a Stasi-like police state doesn’t seem to register with reporters Shaila Dewan, Brenda Goodman, or Crime Stoppers U.S.A President Elaine Cloyd, who hails the snitches for getting “creative” to offset a rough economy.

It’s difficult to judge the most disturbing aspect of this story - the fact that people would slavishly turn in their grandchildren and neighbors for instant cash - or the horrible spectacle of having to endure The New York Times celebrating it.

“For tips that bring results, programs in most places pay $50 to $1,000, with some jurisdictions giving bonuses for help solving the most serious crimes, or an extra “gun bounty” if a weapon is recovered. In Sussex County, the average payment for a tip that results in an arrest is $400,” according to the report.

“Crime doesn’t pay but we do,” say the mobile billboards cruising Jacksonville, Fla. A poster in Jackson, Tenn., draws a neat equation: ‘Ring Ring + Bling Bling = Cha-Ching.’ The bling, in this case, is a pair of handcuffs.”

Enthusiastic spies are assured that they can earn as much as $750 per week for information leading to two or three arrests, more money than a minimum wage job. The tattle-tales’ identity is kept anonymous and they can even report people by text message.

Crime Stoppers coordinator Trish Route described the ability to make a living from reporting friends and family members to the authorities as “wonderful.”

As any budding dictator will tell you, the creation of an informant society where individuals self-regulate their behavior in fear of being turned in by a citizen spy is one of the key stepping stones to tyranny. To have the media celebrate the fact that people are reporting on their neighbors and grandchildren puts the icing on the cake.

Source: *Prison Planet*, May 19, 2008

Gulag ............... Continued from page 11

hepatitis—continue to mount. Meanwhile, the war on drugs has created new problems of its own, including rampant racial disparities in the criminal justice system, broken families, increased poverty, unchecked federal power and eroded civil liberties. Our elected officials need new metrics to determine whether progress is being made.

It’s time for a new bottom line for U.S. drug policy—one that focuses on reducing the cumulative death, disease, crime and suffering associated with both drug misuse and drug prohibition. A good start would be enacting short- and long-term national goals for reducing the problems associated with both drugs and the war on drugs. Such goals should include reducing social problems like drug addiction, overdose deaths, the spread of HIV/AIDS from injection drug use, racial disparities in the criminal justice system, and the enormous number of nonviolent offenders behind bars. Federal drug agencies should be judged—and funded—according to their ability to meet these goals.

Ethan Nadelmann is the executive director of the Drug Policy Alliance.
  http://www.alternet.org/story/83434/

MILITARY SAYS ‘SEGREGATION BOXES’ FOR IRAQI PRISONERS ARE ‘HUMANE’

By David Edwards and Stephen C. Web-ster, CNN, 08/07/2008

CNN’s Barbara Starr, in a Thursday report, examined what the US military is calling ‘segregation boxes’: small, wooden crates being used in Iraq to hold prisoners, which the US military insists are ‘humane.’

Measuring 3 feet square and about 6 feet tall, the military claims that prisoners isolated in the chambers are checked frequently, but the practice is raising concern among human rights advocates.

“There is concern that they could be used in places where detainees are enclosed in extremely hot conditions,” said Jennifer Daskal of Human Rights Watch.

“Typically, prisoners are isolated for no more than 12 hours,” said Starr.

Continued on page 20
CHANGELESS
CHANGE: THE LAW OF POLITICS

By Mumia Abu-Jamal

“Is voting could change the system, they would make it illegal.”

Jamil Al-Amin (H. Rap Brown)

True change doesn’t come through the ballot box—even though we’re all taught that it does. Voting was instituted to insure stability, not change.

I know this may seem somewhat sacrilegious to many entrenched during this current political season, for it certainly looks like change.

But if we look deeper, we see how the very process itself—the campaign—is an exercise in conformity. People come to political campaigns to reassure themselves that their politicians won’t bring too much change.

In essence, our political campaigns are little more than slick popularity contests: who looks best? Who makes me feel most comfortable? Who would I like to have a brew with?

John Kerry lost in 2004 not only because large parts of Ohio were stolen, nor that he was successfully swift-boated by lies about his tour in Vietnam; he lost because his opponents launched a stealth campaign against him branding him as an intellectual, an egghead with advanced degrees who even spoke French!

Americans, especially in this age of anti-intellectualism, aren’t comfortable with eggheads. So, they comfortably ‘elected’ a blockhead.

Therein lies the current contrast between Senators Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton—not race nor gender—but popularity.

At bottom, our politics is 95 percent beauty contest.

On issues, the two are almost inseparable.

And truth be told (despite right wing propaganda to the contrary) neither are actually liberals; both are neo liberals, who are, at heart, globalists of the NAFTA type.

Neither wants to repeal NAFTA—they want to “re-negotiate” it (not really surprising considering that both are also lawyers.).

They are vying for who will become Chief Manager of the Empire, after the Bush wrecking crew is done.

Neither are anti-imperialists—they just want better, smarter management of it; empire, with a smile. (John McCain promises he won’t smile.)

How could it be otherwise with the almost obscene amounts of money in play? How could it be other than this with the hundreds of millions of dollars that have sloshed through all of the presidential campaigns, most of it for media ad buys?

That doesn’t mean that people aren’t interested, or even desperate for change. But what kind of change will they get?

When’s the last time you’ve heard any presidential candidate mention the words imperialism, poor people, or ... capitalism?

When’s the last time you’ve heard any presidential candidate mention the words imperialism, poor people, or—heavens forbid!—capitalism? If they mention capitalism, it’s almost like a religion that needs defending—for no “viable” candidate criticizes capitalism. For, like a religion, it must be believed, just like politicians, until they inevitably betray those who voted for them.

Who do you think they ultimately owe their loyalty to? Those who voted for them, or those who gave them millions of dollars to run?

Source: www.prisonradio.org

April 5, 2008

SYMBOL VERSUS SUBSTANCE

By Mumia Abu-Jamal

Our national politics is largely the stuff of illusion.

It is the stuff of spin. It is the manipulation of images to pluck the heartstrings, or to stoke the furnaces of emotion.

Any emotion will do: love, hate, fear, all are but instruments upon which politicians will play to move people to the polls, to get them either to vote for them, or against their opponents.

What all of this really means in the day-to-day lives of many of the voters, is quite little, for politicians don’t really care about what voters want; they care about those who can afford them—those who pay them well for their services.

In essence, politics is a business, and voters are merely bare necessities.

We see this in the vast, obscene amounts of money raised for virtually all political offices.

At bottom, politics is the elevation of symbol over substance, for it seeks to create the illusion of change, while leaving unchanged the essential power relations at the lower levels of society.

Politics is great for changing forms, but it stumbles at changing essentials.

We’ve seen that in South Africa, where the faces of those in political power have changed dramatically—in its starkest sense, from palest white to darkest black—and yet those who hold financial power, immense wealth, and thus, those who control politicians, remain predominantly white—and remain in ultimate control.

Conversely, for the Black urban and rural poor, their lives are almost as hopeless as before, for what has changed is that a Black middle class has arisen into their political ascendency.

Here in the U.S., we often boast about Blacks having more and more political offices in local, state and federal government posts. Yet, if this is so (and it is) why are our lives so miserable, so threatened, so endangered? Why are our communities so dysfunctional?

Why are Black urban schools so underperforming?

Why are Black and Latino homeowers the bulk of folks losing their homes to foreclosures?

Why are so many of our lives nightmares of survival in the midst of plenty?

How is it that more Black politicians ultimately means less Black political power?

It’s because black-faced politicians can best advance the aims of white economic supremacy. For they are but employees of white wealth, who do the duty of those who can afford them. That great French observer of American politics, Alexis de Tocqueville, aptly noted, “Th’n politics, the American citizen knows no higher profession—for it is the most lucrative.”

Black politicians confuse us with their presence—not their power.

For power is the ability to make change in the conditions of people’s lives (for the better), to represent their interests, and to gain resources for the betterment of Black people and their communities.

Presence is merely being there, being there in the place of a white politician, doing essentially nothing differently.

Source: www.prisonradio.org

April 12, 2008
THE Z UNIT: IT’S A ZINGER!

By Jason A. Wilcox

A hard-core yard calls for a hard-core hole, and that’s what High Desert State Prison (HDSP) provides. “Z unit” is as stark as they come. It is one of those new stand-alone Ad Segs that are all the rage in 180s [prison design] today. The cells are cramped and spartan, without even a desk, mirror, or outside window to look out. It is hard to tell what time it is, or one day from the other. The monotony is deadening. After the courts ruled that CDCR could no longer weld us into our cells, they were forced to come up with a new twist. Now they not only lock our doors and tray slots, they secure them with two padlocks, one on the tray slot and one holding the door closed. The beds are Pelican Bay-style concrete bunks, with no pillows, and they have two 10” x 24” cubby holes in the base of the bottom bunk to store our meager possessions.

Despite the Mar. 12, 2007 memo from the director of Adult Institutions ordering them to do so, Z Unit staff openly brag that they’ll never allow us to have our TVs, radios, or personal property. It took me over four months just to get my address book, shower shoes and dictionary out of property and they refused to issue me the rest.

Not content to deprive us of entertainment from TVs and radios, they also limit us to one book, magazine and newspaper. Any excess reading material is stored in our lockers, which are at the front of our tiers, near the showers, where we can never see them, (or observe what’s being done to them). We must beg, wheedle, cajole, coax and plead with staff for the “privilege” of exchanging a book we’ve already read for one of the newer ones from our storage locker. It can take weeks or months to find a cop who is willing to walk his fat butt down the tier and do an exchange for us. The rest of the turkeys just scowl and snarl, “Not right now.”

Recreation consists of being placed in 8’ x 15’ chain link dog cages, one cell per cage, three times a week, for three or four hours a shot. It’s the only time (except for three showers a week) that we get to come out of our cells, so we try not to miss it. Of course, we have to undergo a butt naked visual cavity search, both going there and coming back, but it’s worth it just to get out of our cells. Unlike most Ad Segs, they are pretty consistent in giving us our cage time.

The cage itself is barren, except for a toilet/sink combo in one corner. Unlike in some states, there are no board games or exercise equipment available to us. We can’t even get a view of our surroundings because 10 ft. from our cages there is a fence with green netting, designed solely to block our view. (Or is it to block the outside world from seeing us?) They forbid us from wearing our thermals out there after March 31st, no matter how deep the snow is. The cages are totally exposed to the elements, so we get sunburned in the summer and frozen in the winter. The only good part is a piece of aluminum that covers a third of the enclosed top to the cage. It casts a weak shadow we can take turns standing under, to avoid the unrelenting desert sun. No guards are posted while we are out there, so you’d better be sure to have your heat strokes or exercise-induced cardiac arrests in your cell, where medical help is theoretically available.

Whether that medical help is any better inside the cell is open for debate. John Clark, RN, is entrusted with looking after our medical needs. He fails in that duty. He’d rather spend all of his time leading bull sessions with the guards, than doing his job, even if that means allowing prisoners to die from lack of medical care. Why should he care? He gets paid the same, no matter how he acts. He refuses to do rounds, or to triage patients. He won’t pick up sick call slips, and we have to file appeals to get our meds refilled or to see a doctor. That can take months. X-rays take at least an additional month, by which time any broken bones will have set wrongly, ensuring us a future full of pain and suffering.

As of this writing, it has been four weeks since we’ve been issued clean sheets. All of our other laundry is full of holes, or way too small to wear. My cellie was given a blanket coated in pepper spray and he’s been trying to exchange it for a clean one for six weeks and counting. Over half of CDCR convicts have Hepatitis C, but the bulls refuse to give us Ajax or disinfectant to clean our cells and toilets with. When we complained, they decided to express their lack of concern for our lives by instituting a joke: once a week they come by and offer us a one ounce shot of windex, telling us to clean our cells with that. No other means are provided to clean our living quarters, in clear violation of CR, Title 15, Sec. 3060.

Older cons uses to advise me to “drink a lot of water and walk slow;” but the water out of the tap has excessive amounts of arsenic in it, so what should we do? The water also has particles floating in it. The overpaid babysitters claim they’ll have the problem fixed “any decade now.” We are forced to choose between being dehydrated and drinking poison.

The food is cold when it’s served to us, and hairnets/gloves are not used. They used to unwrap everything in our lunches, allow it to spoil, and then serve it to us, but after many, many cases of food poisoning, they now leave everything in its original wrapper, except for popping a hole in our bread bags, so that it’ll go stale on us. Regarding vegetables, we are given dirty carrots and the stems from broccoli plants. No one knows what they do with the green, leafy broccoli tops. They either throw them away or feed them to livestock. Either way, we don’t get ‘em. We don’t know why we never get corn, peas or other nutritious veggies.

The law library is woefully inadequate. Books that we need are either missing, or so badly damaged as to be unusable. To prevent us from working on writs in our cells, they’ve passed an underground rule that prevents us from buying manila envelopes. We can’t buy them at canteen, nor can we buy them and take them back to our cells from the law library. I’ve appealed this new rule, and hope to win it, since it’s so obviously illegal. As for reading books, they have a small cart full of books that they’ve confiscated from us convicts, and
they bring it down the tier every couple of weeks. It’s happened twice in the last month and a half. We are allowed to check out one book at a time, unless we are out of the cell for some reason.

Staff commonly throws away our 602s [complaint forms]. The appeals coordinator searches for any pretext, no matter how bogus or false, to reject our appeals. When I 602ed her for refusing to process our appeals, she refused to process it. Talk about adding insult to injury; she claims that appeals coordinators are immune from 602s, which is a blatant lie. I sent her sarcastic and false response to the Sacramento Chief of Inmate Appeals, but he threw it away. The “code of silence” is alive and well in CDCR.

To sum it all up, this is a miserable place, made more so by uncaring, sadistic guards. CDCR claims HDSP is where they house the so-called “worst of the worst” mainline (general population) population (except for the “B” facility here, which they recently made SNY, aka “protective custody.” Because of our perceived reputations, HDSP doesn’t pull any punches when it comes to maltreating us. If you are up for transfer to HDSP, you have my condolences. You won’t like “High Desert Drama!” How bad is life here in Z Unit? It is so horrible that I actually look forward to going to Pelican Bay or Corcoran SHUs, as that will be an improvement over this place, a sort of vacation. Think about that for awhile.

If you are a lawyer or social activist, please know that we can use some outside assistance. Think about that for awhile. What can you do to help us? We are struggling. It is life here in Z Unit? It is so horrible that I actually look forward to going to Pelican Bay or Corcoran SHUs, as that will be an improvement over this place, a sort of vacation. Think about that for awhile.

If you are a lawyer or social activist, please know that we can use some outside help. Contact CPF via snail mail, phone or email and we will try to assist. 

**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

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**GOOD FOOD = GOOD BEHAVIOR**

*By Roger Hummel*

Imprisoned souls have long complained that prison food is tasteless, unappetizing, and nutritionally barren. Not only is the quality of food criticized by the prisoners but the miniscule servings often border on starvation rations. Anecdotal evidence now suggests that poorly-fed prisoners are more unruly than those who are well fed.

For example, recent studies in Europe have cast new light on the relationship between prison food and prisoner behavior. In 2002, Natural Justice, a British charity outfit, ran a 9-month study of 231 British prisoners. These prisoners received daily rations of vitamins, minerals, and essential fatty acids such as omega-3s while a control group of prisoners received placebos.

During the study, the number of disciplinary offenses committed by each prisoner was documented. Those who received the extra nutrients committed an average of 26 percent fewer violations than those who received the placebos. More importantly, the number of violent offenses was 37 percent lower for the properly nourished prisoners. The results of the study were published in 2002 in the *British Journal of Psychiatry*.

Two years later, a study in the Netherlands yielded similar conclusions. The number of disciplinary offenses among the well-nourished prisoners fell to almost half.

Today, Dr. John Stein, a professor of neuroscience at Oxford University in England, is about to embark on a similar study in three British prisons. Stein will recruit 1,000 prisoners to test his theory that good nutrition leads to good behavior. Half of the prisoners will receive extra nutrients while the others will receive a placebo in a double-blind study.

No one is suggesting that proper nutrition is the only factor that governs a prisoner’s behavior. It is, however, increasingly clear that a nutritionally inferior diet can make behavior worse.

In prisons closer to home, New York City Corrections Commissioner Martin Horn announced in February that inmates will no longer have access to butter, whole milk, candy, white bread, or sweetened drinks. Horn, whose medical credentials were not disclosed, said with fewer prisoners “having a stroke or going into diabetic shock,” it will save taxpayers money.

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**602 RULING DISMISSES FOOD QUALITY CONCERNS**

This piece is a summary of a claim sent to the courts this late spring.

Robert Luca asked for a writ from the Superior Court of California relating to several aspects for food service. The claims include: nutritionally inadequate food; inconsistently portioned food; and is served in an unsanitary process, particularly with respect to hot meals that were not served hot enough (to possibly minimize the growth of bacteria. Administrative complaints (602s) on this issue did not result in improvements.

The court’s response concluded there was no evidence that the prisoner was deprived of “minimal civilized measures of life’s necessities” and there was no indifference to inmate health and welfare. The court’s ruling stated “the circular logic that ‘hot means not cold’ (and therefore ‘cold means not hot’) is unacceptable.” It also demanded the “respondent should determine [the temperature range that is acceptable to most consumers] and establish a preparation/serving procedure to assure a reasonable level of compliance…. The court orders respondent to do so and file serve the proposed procedure within 90 days of service of the ruling.”

Robert Luca plans file his appeal on the basis of discovery, as his attorney never filed a motion to compel, when he said that he would.

Luca also reports that the judge basically took their word for it, even with two c/o’s testifying mostly on Luca’s behalf. The judge even “said the 602 process does not work.”

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**SELL YOUR ART ON THE WEB**

Prisoner-created art and crafts, except any writings, sold over the Internet. Send only copies, no originals!

Offer void where prohibited by prison rules. Send a SASE for a free brochure.

Prison Art is a not-for-profit service.
SOUL CONFINEMENT IN INDIANA
By Khalfani Khaldun

Across the U.S., prisons within prison are proliferating. These units used for solitary confinement go by bland and bureaucratic names like Security Housing Units, Closed Custody, Management Control Units, or Special Confinement Units. Prison officials seem to feel they need a type of second sentencing at their disposal, one without the due process strings of state and federal law.

Prisons and control units are also a warden’s dream solution for neutralizing convicts who have shown leadership potential, intelligence, legal expertise, integrity, independent thought, ethnic pride, or allegiance to a higher power. The threat of being placed in these control units also produces a chilling effect, pressuring individuals to remain unaffiliated, extremely passive, and vulnerable. SHUs pose special strings of state and federal law.

Shawnee Correctional Facility also houses the Special Confinement Unit (SCU). This is a 23-hour-a-day lockdown, no contact facility. The only contact we have is when we’re being placed in restraints and escorted by several pigs holding a dog leash hooked onto the handcuffs. We are also not allowed any contact with our family, children, supporters and friends. The SCU visits are behind a thick glass window and communication is through a two-way telephone.

These visits have long placed undue hardships on prisoners and our families. These visits are for only one hour, and only extended to families who come from as far as Chicago orGary, Indiana. To be deprived of physical contact with our family members is tantamount to unwarranted punishment placed upon our loved ones.

On November 26, 2007, prisoners in charge of the SCU engaged in another act of repression. They instituted yet another visitation change that further isolates us from our families and loved ones. For some strange reason, all SCU visits are now on a status called “video screen monitoring.” This procedure has now taken away our ability to actually see one another. The no-contact visits at least allowed us to sit across from one another with a glass wall separating the visitors. Phones allowed for clear communication. Now we can only see one family member at a time on a video computer screen. It cuts the view at the heads and shoulders. Only ten visitor booths are available on this entire unit that totals 227 prisoners. If ten families show up all at once, and then five more show up there will be no room to facilitate them. Visits will be cut short. We were never afforded the opportunity of the due process right to challenge these visits. No one at this facility issued a memorandum, directive or policy mandating the approval to implement them. In essence, these prisoners just went ahead and did it, and said: “Damn the consequences.”

Since the visits began, prisoners have filed several complaints that the screen is not clear. They do not allow our families to see us clearly – the camera causes us to look down at the computer screen, and our loved ones can only view the top of our head. This is absolutely wrong, cruel, and dehumanizing.

PRISONERS OF THE PRISON INDUSTRY
Cape Cod Times, 08-01-2008

America has become the most imprisoned nation on Earth. Per capita, more Americans are in jail than are Cubans, Iranians, or Chinese. We have more young black men in prison than in college. Prisons are the most rapidly-growing segment of American government.

In 1970, our entire system held under 200,000 inmates. Include local jails and we now incarcerate 2.3 million Americans. Almost one-quarter of the world’s prisoners are Americans.

Some weeks ago in this space, we looked at the dangers of substituting contractors for enlisted military personnel. We have a similar problem with our prisons. In the name of public safety and efficiency, we’ve been persuaded to turn many of our prisons over to private contractors who build, staff and operate prisons and collect a fee per prisoner, per day. In the process, we’ve financed a powerful corporate lobby whose primary interest is profits, not public service.

It is not an attack on private enterprise to point out that the purpose of democratic government is to promote the general welfare, and to use taxpayer’s money for all the people’s sake. Whether public money is bailing out the shareholders of Fannie Mae or hiring mercenaries in Iraq or lining the pockets of the Corrections Corporation of America, it is an abuse of the public trust. Of course we have to remember, these are often the policies of bureaucrats who claim to hate government and “privatize” its functions whenever possible. Let’s see what this has gotten us.

A for-profit prison system sees medical care, retraining and rehabilitation as overhead and cuts corners whenever possible. The corporate prison industry requires as many customers as possible. Turning felons back into citizens is already very difficult. Pilot programs exist that have dramatically cut recidivism, but for-profit institutions have vested interests in not trying them. California spends $49,000 per prisoner per year. Of this, less than $700 goes for education, under $300 for vocational training. The prison library gets $23.

A prison industry has a vested interest in jailing as many people — and keeping them jailed — for as long as possible. Consequently, the industry lobbies state and federal government aggressively to criminalize as many activities as possible and maximize sentences. These efforts fall on fertile soil with legislators eager to appear tough on crime, and happy to collect campaign contributions when they vote accordingly.

Over half our inmates in federal penitentiaries are there on drug charges, often for simple possession. Neither rapists nor murderers face a systematic matrix of mandatory sentencing and denial of scholarships or other forms of public assistance as do drug offenders. At some point the costs, both monetary and human, of breaking up families and using increasingly scarce public money should suggest we’d do better to learn from our Canadian and European friends: for most offenders, especially nonviolent ones, drug dependency is better understood as a medical problem than a criminal one. In America, it has become profitable to think otherwise.

A ballooning prison industry becomes parasitic, devouring public resources needed for education and infrastructure. Florida, according to TIME magazine, is a perfect example of a foundering public education system beaten out by the prison lobby in its scramble for funds. State after state is
seeing its prison industry consuming more than its share of public money.

As with the overuse of corporate contractors in Iraq, we see the chickens of privatization coming home to roost. We’ve been told that private enterprise can do virtually everything more cheaply and efficiently than government. Once again we’re learning this is not true. What successful businesses do efficiently is make money by cutting costs and expanding markets. When the object is public service, every dollar taken out for profit, management and shareholders is a dollar not available to purchase the services the taxpayer paid for. While this is in the interest of corporate investors, it does not promote the general good.

Bills keep coming due that we’re increasingly unable to pay. Meanwhile, those who’ve enriched themselves at our expense all these years will be keeping every penny, even as the rest of us tighten our belts. 

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Lawrence Brown of Hyannis teaches humanities at Cape Cod Academy in Osterville. His column appears every Friday. Reach him at 508-771-5096.

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**PA-DOC GOUGING LONG-TERM PRISONERS**

By Sadot Williams

The administration at SCI-Greene, the Super Max facility in southwestern Pennsylvania, is keeping its 500-plus bed long-term solitary confinement (isolation) unit, which sits outside of the main gen-population prison, filled to maximum capacity with well over 90 percent African Americans and Hispanic prisoners for financial gains in a deal worked out with Prison Health Services—the privatized healthcare provider for the PS-DOC based out of Brentwood, Tennessee.

Prisoners, locked down in the long-term confinement unit, are forced to pay high sick call fees for over the counter meds that are sold to gen-population prisoners at commissary for a fraction of the cost of going to sick call. Under PA-DOC policy, prisoners in long-term confinement are permitted to keep their non-narcotic meds prescriptions in their cell to self-medicate. However, prisoners in long-term confinement in need of cold meds, antacid tabs or food ointment they must first pay $5.00 to be seen at sick call and then another $5.00 for the meds, when the same foot ointment, cold meds, or antacid tabs are all sold to gen-population prisoners for less than $3.25 each at the commissary.

Related, long-term confinement prisoners are not permitted to have prison work assignments to help them with money for basic needs like hygiene/healthcare items. So for those who are not blessed to receive financial support from loved ones, debt to prison health services can accumulate very quickly. Most grievances to the administration about this unwritten policy have gone unanswered and for the few grievances where a response was given, they were vague open-ended form statements.

This is just one of the dozens of oppressive acts that take place daily in the SCI-Greene SuperMax facility long-term solitary confinement unit.

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**WHAT IF 5.3 MILLION MORE AMERICANS COULD VOTE?**

*By Erika Wood*

Across the country there are 5.3 million Americans who are denied the right to vote because of a felony conviction in their past. Nearly 4 million of these people are not in prison; they live, work, pay taxes, and raise families in our communities, but remain disenfranchised for years, often for decades, and sometimes for life.

States vary widely on when they restore voting rights to former prisoners. Maine and Vermont do not disenfranchise people with convictions; even prisoners may vote there. Thirteen states and the District of Columbia disenfranchise people only while they are incarcerated; five states disenfranchise those who are incarcerated or on parole, but allow people on probation to vote; 20 states disenfranchise people in prison, on parole, and on probation; and 10 states permanently disenfranchise some categories of people who have completed their correctional supervision. Kentucky and Virginia are the last two remaining states that permanently disenfranchise all people with felony convictions, unless they apply for and receive individual, discretionary clemency from the governor.

To fully appreciate how these laws compromise our democracy, it is important to understand their deep roots in the troubled history of American race relations. In the late 1800s these laws spread as part of a larger backlash against the adoption of the Reconstruction Amendments—the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Amendments of the U.S. Constitution—which ended slavery, granted equal citizenship to freed slaves, and prohibited racial discrimination in voting.

Over time, Southern Democrats sought to solidify their hold on the region by modifying voting laws in ways that would exclude African-Americans from the polls. Despite their newfound eligibility to vote, many freed slaves remained effectively disenfranchised. (Violence and intimidation were rampant.) The legal barriers employed—including literacy tests, residency requirements, grandfather clauses, and poll taxes—while race-neutral on their face, were intentional barriers to African-American voting.

Felony disenfranchisement laws were also key deterrent to the African American vote.

Between 1865 and 1900, 18 states adopted laws restricting the voting rights of criminal offenders. By 1900, 38 states had some type of felon voting restriction, most of which disenfranchised convicted felons until they received a pardon. At the same time, states expanded the criminal codes to punish offenses including vagrancy, petty larceny, miscegenation, bigamy, and receiving stolen goods. Aggressive arrest and conviction efforts followed, motivated by the practice of “convict leasing,” whereby former slaves were convicted of crimes and then leased out to work the very plantations and factories from which they had ostensibly been freed. Thus targeted criminalization and felony disenfranchisement combined to produce both practical re-enslavement and the legal loss of voting rights, usually for life, which effectively suppressed the political power of African Americans for decades.

The disproportionate impact of felony disenfranchisement laws on people of color continues to this day. Nationwide, 13 percent of African-American men have lost the right to vote, a rate that is seven times the national average. In eight states, more than 15 percent of African-Americans cannot vote due to a felony conviction, and four of those states—Arizona, Iowa, Kentucky, and Nebraska—disenfranchise more than 20 percent of their African-American voting-age population.
These statistics mirror stark racial disparities in the criminal justice system. A recent study by the Pew Center on the States revealed that 1 in 100 Americans is now behind bars. That figure is startling enough, but the study also reports that 1 in 9 African-American men between the ages of 20 and 34 is in prison.

Felony disenfranchisement laws do not only impact those who lose their voting rights. Entire communities lose their political capital when their citizens cannot vote. Denying the vote to one person has a ripple effect, dramatically decreasing the political power of urban and minority communities. Throughout the country, minority communities have lost political influence thanks to felony disenfranchisement laws. In the last 25 years, as incarceration rates skyrocketed and African-Americans were sent to prison at a rate seven times that of whites, the political power of minority communities has been decimated. It’s a simple equation: communities with high rates of people with felony convictions have fewer votes to cast. Consequently, all residents of these communities, not just those with convictions, lose their political influence.

What’s more, even when people with felony convictions are eligible to vote, they are often de facto disenfranchised due to bureaucratic barriers. In 2003, Alabama could not process more than 80 percent of applications within statutory time limits, and completely failed to respond to dozens of applications. And in New York, Brennan Center surveys have repeatedly uncovered widespread confusion and misinformation among elections officials. In 2005, one third of local election boards mistakenly advised that people could not vote while on probation, and many illegally required unnecessary documentation before allowing people to register.

Fortunately, there are signs of progress. Advocates, policy-makers, and some unusual allies have made great strides towards restoring voting rights, and have built significant national momentum towards building a more just and inclusive democracy.

Critics of voting restoration argue that disenfranchisement is an appropriate punishment for breaking the law. But in fact, many in law enforcement have come to believe that felony disenfranchisement laws do more harm than good. The American Probation and Parole Association recently released a resolution calling for restoration of voting rights upon completion of prison, finding that “disenfranchisement laws work against the successful reentry of offenders.” Many realize that, in terms of public safety, bringing people into the political process makes them stakeholders, helping to steer former offenders away from future crimes. As one Kentucky prosecutor wrote, “Voting shows a commitment to the future of the community.” Branding people as political outsiders by barring them from the polls disrupts reentry into the community and does not do anything to keep people from re-offending. There is absolutely no credible evidence showing that continuing to disenfranchise people after release from prison serves any legitimate law enforcement purpose. Disenfranchisement has nothing to do with being “tough on crime.”

Since 1997, 16 states have reformed their laws to expand the franchise or ease voting rights restoration procedures. Recent reforms include an executive order signed by then-Governor Tom Vilsack in Iowa which restored voting rights to 80,000 Iowa citizens on Independence Day, 2005. On Election Day 2006, Rhode Island voters were the first in the country to approve a state constitutional amendment authorizing automatic restoration of voting rights to people as soon as they are released from prison. The Rhode Island Department of Corrections became a voter registration agency, and now every individual is handed a voter registration form on the day they leave prison. In April 2007, Florida Governor Charlie Crist issued new clemency rules ending that state’s policy of permanent disenfranchisement for all felony offenders. Also in April 2007, Maryland Governor Martin O’Malley signed a law streamlining the state’s complicated restoration system by automatically restoring voting rights upon completion of sentence.

This law also eliminated the requirement that people in Maryland pay off any court-imposed fees and fines before being able to register to vote.

And just last month, Kentucky Gov. Steve Beshear eliminated some of the burdensome requirements his predecessor imposed on people trying to get their voting rights restored. People with felony convictions have been disenfranchised for life in Kentucky and can only regain their right to vote by receiving clemency from the governor.

Still, millions of U.S. citizens continue to be denied the right to vote. This year, Congress has decided to address the issue on a national level. Sen. Russ Feingold and Rep. John Conyers will soon introduce the Democracy Restoration Act, a bill that seeks to restore voting rights in federal elections to all Americans who have been released from prison and are living in the community. In February, Senator Feingold, joined by former republican congressman and Bush I cabinet member, Jack Kemp, wrote, “Once the criminal justice system has determined that [people] are ready to return to the community, they should receive the rights and responsibilities that come with that status, and should not continue to be relegated to second-class citizenship.”

The energy and optimism spreading across our country this election season is palpable. But our democracy stands for nothing if not the fundamental tenet that each citizen is entitled to one vote, and each vote counts the same regardless of who casts it. The promise of our democracy will never be realized if 4 million Americans remain disenfranchised. It is time to end this last blanket barrier to the ballot box.

Erika Wood is deputy director of the Democracy Program at the Brennan Center for Justice at NYU School of Law where she directs the Right to Vote project. Her most recent publication is “Restoring the Right to Vote.”

Source: AlterNet, http://www.alternet.org/story/82457/
ED’S COMMENTS

By Ed Mead

Before I was a revolutionary I was a jailhouse lawyer (in fact I’m the co-founder of Prison Legal News). If you too are interested in jailhouse lawyering or the law, I have a book for you. Well, it is not out yet. It is being written by Mumia Abu-Jamal and is tentatively called Jailhouse Lawyers – Prisoner Defending Prisoners vs. the USA. My good friend Noelle Hanrahan of the Prison Radio Project gave me a draft copy to look over. Oh yes, I do have a small chapter in the book called “From ‘Social Prisoner’ to Jailhouse Lawyer, to Revolutionary: Ed Mead’s Journey.”

Anyway, while reading the manuscript I saw a couple of quotes about the law I would like to share with you. (Actually, I’d like to share wide swaths of the book with you. [Actually, I’d like to share wide swaths of the book with you.] Anyway, while reading the manuscript I saw a couple of quotes about the law I would like to share with you. (Actually, I’d like to share wide swaths of the book with you, but that would be wrong and besides I do not have the space to do so here.)

In the book, Mumia examines the question: “What is the law?” He cites the French Enlightenment thinker Rousseau as saying the “…law is an invention of the strong to chain and rule the weak.” He also quotes Karl Marx from the Communist Manifesto to the effect that the law is “the will of [one] class made into a law for all.” After citing a liberal and a revolutionary, Mumia quotes a capitalist who writes the same thing. Adam Smith, author of the 1776 The Wealth of Nations, lectured on whom the law serves:

“Laws and governments may be considered in this and indeed in every case as a combination of the rich to oppress the poor, and preserve to themselves the inequality of the goods which would otherwise be soon destroyed by the attacks of the poor, who if not hindered by the government would soon reduce the others to an equality with themselves.”

Yes, capitalist law is to prevent equality. For those of you suffering from the illusion that the law is anything other than an instrument of class rule, there you have it—from the horse’s mouth.

Here’s an item I came across today. According to a May 5th statement issued by San Francisco Sheriff Michael Hennessey, 60 percent of all prisoners in his jail are African American, and 67 percent of the female prisoners are black. Yet because housing prices in that city have steadily increased, the black population has been decreasing. Only 6.7 percent of San Francisco’s population is black, while the percentage of blacks in the U.S. is just under 14 percent.

Sheriff Hennessey said the criminal justice system is “disproportionately adversely affecting San Francisco’s African American community.” Gee, ya think?

There are online bulletin boards called forums dealing with a variety of issues, including forums for prisoner family members and loved ones (in fact I even run a small forum at http://www.prisonart.org/forums). I was in such a forum recently and the first post I read was this one from a California woman:

“It’s so bad how prisons are run, you know races not getting along, if you’re black you can’t come over here, if you’re a northerner Latin, you can’t walk over here, if you’re white, you can’t sit over here, if you are a soreno, you can’t walk over here. It makes it so hard on us during visits because sometimes when I visit, and I’m in line waiting to be processed small chit chat can begin with a person of another race. When I get inside, my man may say, “don’t sit at that table, I can’t sit with a soreno/black/white/northerner”...

He isn’t aware that the person’s wife and I exchanged smiles in the parking lot. So I have to act like I have never seen her before. There are also some of you who have your pictures on here that I see when I go to see my man, but I dare not smile or let you know I recognize you for fear that our men don’t get along. What a world we live in...”

Because this was a large forum board there were lots of posts on this subject. Family members and loved ones of prisoners from all over the country chimed in on the discussion. One after another, from state after state, said it was not that way at the facility where their loved ones were confined. “It’s not that way here in New York,” one would say. And another would add “not here in Kentucky either.” Reading through all the posts it appeared that only California visitors were subjected to this level of artificial division (not by the state, mind you, but by the prisoners themselves).

There was another thread saying that The Association of Paroling Authorities International recently voted to approve a resolution to restore voting rights to individuals after release from prison. The APAI is an international membership organization composed of criminal justice professionals dedicated to maintaining responsible parole practices. While their little resolution is nice, technically speaking they can’t really keep ex-convicts from voting. U.S. Constitution’s 15th Amendment Section 1, says “The right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any state on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude.” You can’t get much simpler than that.

We should not only be pushing for the vote for those released from prison, which is an easy victory, but for the right to vote for those still behind bars. When prisoners have the vote in the county or town they are incarcerated, constructive change (well, just reforms) will follow. Most of these prisons are located in remote areas near small towns where their vote will count.

So there you sit, a literal slave of the state (a status legitimized by the Thirteenth Amendment), totally disenfranchised, kept in a state of continual dependency and irresponsibility, in living conditions not fit for an animal, and confined at gun point against your will. Yet California prisoners won’t be having that vote and things will not be changing for the better as long as they remain so foolishly divided. All they can focus on is that the guy in the next cell is of a different skin color or comes from a different region.

The times they are a changing – endless war, the gutting of habeas corpus, tax breaks for the rich, high gas prices, high food prices, incompetent disaster relief, home foreclosures, lack of jobs, a loss of faith in the system and much more. Health care is a joke for poor people and even life expectancy in the U.S. has dropped—we are now down to 42nd in the world. Wanna know what’s next for the economy? Look at California, the world’s seventh largest economy: consumer spending down, unemployment up, and municipalities going bust. It’s gonna get much worse for prisoners—more crowding and less money for things like food. All of this will soon combine to create a climate for progressive change. You on the inside have a year or two to prepare for the struggle that will bring about this change. Waste time and what little you have now will be looked back on as the good old days.

Change? Oh yeah, Barack Obama promises change (they all do). A section of the white ruling class wants to put a black face
information violated Herman’s constituted that the state’s failure to disclose this favors to the state’s witness.” He acknowledgthat the jury had been aware of the promise and thus the majority did not choose to argue that the facts as set out by the magistrate and Judge Welch weren’t correct; they just recent post-conviction appeal. The Coalition issued the following statement in response to the First Circuit’s ruling:

Louisiana Justice turned a blind eye to its own injustice. Despite asking that evidence be taken in the case of *Louisiana v. Herman Wallace* they ignored the magistrate’s findings that Herman was convicted on the basis of favors being offered to the state’s witnesses for their testimony. The decision was 2 -1 denying relief. The majority failed to give any reason for their decision, while Judge Welch had the courage to say: “There was a reasonable likelihood that the verdict would have different had the jury been aware of the promise and favors to the state’s witness.”

The majority did not choose to argue that the facts as set out by the magistrate and Judge Welch weren’t correct; they just decided that these uncontradicted facts did not warrant a new trial, without giving a reason for their decision. Thus they sanctioned the long established pattern in the country of using promises to snitches to obtain convictions regardless of the truth.

Outside the U.S. Department of Justice facing the R.F. Kennedy Courtyard is carved the statement “When Justice is done in the U.S. Courts, America wins.” America lost today.

However, Herman Wallace and Albert Woodfox, will not quit seeking Justice. They are innocent and those who have pledged to come to their aid will not fail in their mission. We will continue appealing their verdicts, continue helping the murdered guard’s widow find the truth, and continue to speak out against a justice system that places old men who are not a threat to society in isolation, uses snitches and informants to obtain convictions regardless of the truth, and incarcerates individuals whose political and religious beliefs do not conform to those in power.

We call on all political, religious and moral authorities in this country to work for their release. More importantly we call on every citizen in this country to join this effort. As long as Herman and Albert are in prison we are not free. *The third of the Angola Three, Robert King Wilkerson, was exonerated by the State of Louisiana in February 2001 and subsequently released.*

**BEYOND ABU GHRAIB & GITMO: STOP TORTURE IN THE U.S.**

June 26 marked the United Nations International Day in Support of Victims of Torture. The spotlight has been shining for months on U.S. government torture of prisoners at the Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo Bay detention facilities, and these abuses were a major focus of attention on June 26. But the U.S. Human Rights Network and its 255 member organizations have long argued that torture does not begin and end outside U.S. borders, and we urge that local, state and federal governments take immediate steps to stop the domestic physical and mental abuses that contravene international anti-torture law. “Examples of torture in the U.S. have been documented by U.S. organizations and verified by the U.N. for more than a decade,” says Network Executive Director Ajamu Baraka. “It is high time for these practices to be abolished.”

Though most people associate torture with waterboarding, sleep deprivation and other interrogation techniques, the actual definition goes well beyond that narrow scope to include “cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.” Various international agreements and covenants that have been ratified by the U.S. use this language, including the universal Declaration of Human Rights and the U.N. Convention Against Torture, which came into force on June 26, 1987.

**Continued on page 31**
HISTORY TRAIN

By Bato

The History Train, ever movin', ever weary heartbeats poundin' on tracks soundin', choo choo, our lives, ever rollin' with the journey of one's travels and travails, until the miles run out, surely the miles run out for all passengers on-board. The sum of one's wayward history in relation to everything else... passed on the way. Your personal ride. Where you got on, where you get off. The last stop. The train continuing on... hasta, hasta. In sum: What didja see?; What didja hear?; What didja know? Or was it all just stop and go... por la vida?

HISTORY Speaks to those that listen. Listen and hear beyond blind isolation, and what the indolent mind confines. Heartbeats in sync, with the universe of unlimited worlds and possibilities. What is both known and unknown. We can feel our way thru portals of glimpsed light, the flicker and static glitter of the guiding principle of I AM. Sight unseen. Surely, one can know what IS. Have and obtain knowledge. Reach a center of clarity, a rigorously gained and strived for plateau of inner sight, in an otherwise world full of illusion and self deception. Enlarging one's mind thru exploration, overcoming debilitating thoughts in debilitating environs—that's the way. History that returns to reflect upon us helps us connect with self. Good and bad intent, is shaped and reshaped into one's current reality. The process of reason, keeping in mind what we know, the exercise of logic over speculation and bad mental subjective assessments. What we know; what we don’t know; what we learn. Tell a friend...

HISTORY that each day, extends further into a blurry hurried past, later to return to confound us, trip up us and contradict us with the absurd. The invented. Proofs and more proofs, factoids and fibs that drain away and wash out with time but remain the same. Actuality, never again to return to reassure us of the actual fact of the matter. The que paso? What was said; what we thought we heard; what we forgot or failed to remember.

HISTORY that invariably surrounds us, encapsulates our artificially contrived surface environment. Captures our imagination or fantasy, our ignorance, and shades our perceptions. Stealth history: a false reality inserted into the history book of events that is our sole reliable truth...
REFLECTIONS FROM THE STOP MAX CONFERENCE

The American Friends Service Committee called a conference in late May to bring together activists, former prisoners, lawyers and community workers working on supermax or control unit prisons. Essentially, prisons within prisons, with titles like Security Housing Unit or Adjustment Center; these prison units have been in existence for a long time. With growing modern popularity, the AFSC and other organizations came together years ago to try to gather a critical mass with the goal to shut down these units. Today, AFSC is spearheading another campaign to bring awareness and strengthen the fight against supermax prisons with the organizations and individuals still dedicated to their abolition.

Speakers at the conference included, Rubin “Hurricane” Carter, human rights activist, former boxer and exoneree from a triple life sentence; Jimmy Santiago Baca a poet, teacher, and former Supermax prisoner; Terry Kupers M.D. psychiatrist, author, and expert witness in several class action law suits on the quality of mental health services inside control unit prisons and jails; and Laura Whitehorn former prisoner of isolation and editor of POZ magazine.

Several members of California Prison Focus attended and here are two pieces that came from what they called an inspiring event.

STOP MAX – WITH EXAMPLES!

By Penny Schoner

 Completely overhaul the Parchman Farms SHU? No longer a dream.
A team of attorneys and their local assistants fought for roughly nine years, through several court actions, to compel the state to follow its own laws. Cases of the men inside were put before a bargaining committee and many of the men were released into general population; some released from prison when it was found they had served more time than their sentence required. Next the medical staff was evaluated and found in need of replacement. Qualified staff was hired and an outside oversight committee established. The complete report on this project is riveting and will be published soon.

California delegates needed to hear some success stories and the STOP MAX Conference supplied them. Thirty-three workshops were held, presented three and four at a time, and the California delegation spread out with tape recorders so we wouldn’t miss too much. A sampling of the subjects: Unlock the box: Lessons and strategies in fighting isolation; Closing Prisons, fighting for justice; Self Advocacy, getting results for prison abuse; The Successful Overhaul of the Mississippi Prison Supermax prison; Impact of death penalty on families; Creative Writing for survival in solitary; Education vs. incarceration; History of supermax litigation; From Isolation cell block to the City Block; Struggles of native American religious and spiritual practices in prison; Psychiatric torture and violence against prisoners; Women Prisoners and Rights; Legacy of Torture, the war against the Black Liberation Movement; Counter Abuse campaigns are Resistance struggles in supermax prisons; Changing the militaristic model for personal and social change in the gang unit. This last workshop was put on by a group of young men who have been organizing around this issue in Maine and surrounding states.

We met for three days. The third day regional meetings formed strategy sessions to plan the way forward. Future conference calls will assist in coordinating. There was an art show with prisoners’ work and were quite commendable. American Friends Service Committee made us feel welcome in Philadelphia. Many ex-prisoners shared a lot of wisdom with us. California Prison Focus wants to thank AFSC again for a fine and informative conference.

IMAGINING A WORLD WITHOUT PRISONS

By Andrea Parra

The recent STOPMAX Campaign Conference (held in Philadelphia) was attended by people from all over the nation. What the 300+ individuals had in common was respect and demand for human rights for all, particularly prisoners enduring the torture and abuse of being placed in isolation.

Inspired by Justice Now’s CD, The We That Sets Us Free: Building a World Without Prisons, I asked several people what they thought a world without prisons would be like and here are their responses:

“A world where human beings are healed and forgiven. A world where human rights are provided to all…a world where children can be counseled and loved.”

—Beneta Standly, ACLU (GA)

“A world without prisons would look like this: you could walk into any hospital and get free services, you could walk into any university, sign up that day and just start going to class. It would mean that there wouldn’t be any borders because borders are a form of prisons.”

—Francisco, Chicano Mexicano Prison Project (CA)

“A world without prisons would look like 100 percent employment, a focus on individual creativity and that all life is valued...a world without prisons would mean that the elderly would embrace the youth and the youth would embrace the elderly. A world without prisons would be a place where people feel like a part of the environment and feel as though they had an
invested interest. Everyone would feel like they’re able to contribute and their creativity could be expressed...and maybe it might look like a rainbow gathering!”

—Ham’diya Mu, Human Rights Coalition (PA)

“A world without prisons would be heaven. It would be beautiful. No one would have to look at brick walls, they’d be able to see the trees and birds flying and see the morning doves kissing and singing. And they wouldn’t have to feel like their soul was caged.”

—former woman prisoner

“Um...um...children ruling the whole world and universe!”

—8 year old whose father is a former prisoner

“We have to remember that this land, this land that’s known as the U.S., was indeed a world without prisons before white people came. And it could be again, a practical world where we solve our problems, help our children and build safe and honored communities.”

—Jamie Bissonette, author of When the Prisoners Ran Walpole

“A world without prisons would be beautiful. We could start to rejuvenate and nurture our most precious resource which is the human resource.”

—Soffiyah Elijah, Deputy Director of the Criminal Justice Institute at Harvard

CURB FILES SUIT TO STOP PRISON CONSTRUCTION

On May 6, Californians United for a Responsible Budget (CURB) and several individual taxpayers filed a lawsuit to block the issuance of $7.4 billion in bonds to finance construction of 53,000 new prison and jail beds. This program, approved by the legislature in legislation known as AB 900, represents the largest prison expansion in history. The bonds the state intends to issue to finance this construction are “lease revenue bonds,” a financing mechanism used to avoid submitting the bonds to a popular vote as required by the California Constitution.

The suit claims the bonds are illegal for several reasons. First, based on the testimony of the plaintiffs’ expert these bonds will cost Californians more than $1 billion more (in today’s dollars) than general obligation bonds that are approved by a vote. The suit contends that this is an illegal waste of public resources with no corresponding public benefit.

Further, the plaintiffs contend that the bonds themselves and the interim financing used to finance construction before the bonds are issued are both subject to the provision in the state constitution that requires a vote of the people before the Legislature can incur debt in excess of $300,000 (Article XVI, Section 1). The plaintiffs argue that, because the voters defeated bonds for prison construction in 1990 and 1996, the state is using the “lease-revenue” financing arrangement to attempt to avoid this constitutional requirement.

The plaintiffs are asking the court to declare both the proposed bonds and the interim financing based on the bonds illegal, and to permanently prohibit the state from issuing the bonds without first submitting them to a vote of the people.

If successful, the suit will restore Californians’ rights to vote on whether they want to build more prisons; it will slow the rapidly expanding prison budget—which will soon overtake spending on higher education; and it will create pressure for real change in the state’s sentencing and parole policies.

For more information about the lawsuit see CURB’s website: www.curbprisonspending.org. →

DEFEAT THE RUNNER INITIATIVE

The Runner Initiative, qualified for the November 8th ballot, would increase prison spending by over $1 billion the first year and more than $20 billion over the first 40 years, worsening California’s ongoing budget crisis. It would also prosecute more youth as adults, undo trends towards youth rehabilitation, increase drug sentencing, force the reporting of undocumented immigrants who are arrested to Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), refuse bail for undocumented immigrants arrested for “gang-related” or violent felonies and forces people in public housing to be subject to annual criminal background checks, subjecting people to lose their homes. This initiative increases penalties for drug-related offenses and offenses alleged to be listed under the broad umbrella of gang related even though experts have said that medical treatment and social services are more effective deterrents. It creates a flawed hearsay exception allowing the admission of out-of-court testimony when an individual refuses to testify, despite a court order to do so, and denies due process and legal protections for all Californians, and much more. ↔

Source: www.defeatrunner.org

HELP DEFEAT MARSY’S LAW AND RUNNER INITIATIVES

TiPS has completed a very thorough analysis of both initiatives, and is preparing final documents for distribution to our members. TiPS is also preparing to defeat the initiatives by hosting nearly three dozen community events throughout California.

TiPS needs more than 900 volunteers throughout California. Volunteering is easy, and can be for as little as one hour per week. If you are interested in defeating these initiatives, but are sitting by hoping someone else will do the job, then I strongly encourage you to get involved today, and right away.

TiPS believes a public education campaign is the best chance against these Initiatives. Some of the roles we envision our volunteers can fill are:

1) Volunteer Coordinators
2) Voter Registration Assistants
3) Media Assistance
4) Organizing Town Hall Meetings
5) Public Speakers
6) Inmate Visitor Volunteers
7) Phone/Computer Volunteers
8) Faith-Based Community Outreach
9) Volunteers to reach out to local business owners and organizations

We have a tough job ahead of us and we need all the help we can get. Please email help@forpublicsafety.com if you can help with these tasks. In all cases TiPS will answer questions and guide volunteers toward succeeding with our goals.

Taxpayers for Public Safety (TiPS) power is inherent in its members. Every single member is important and essential to our ability to reach new potential members and increase the reach of our union.” ↔
AFSC STOPMAX
CONFERENCE

Temple University, June 2008
By Bonnie Kerness,
AFSC Prison Watch Project

I want to thank the AFSC for renewing its commitment to issues of isolation and torture in US prisons; the AFSC Healing Justice staff for their collective brilliance and spirit and Naima Black and the Stopmax Team for organizing this extraordinary community.

In the mid 80’s I received a letter from Ojore Lutalo who had just been placed in the Management Control Unit at Trenton State Prison. He asked what a control unit was, why he was in there and how long he would have to stay. At that point, we knew little of control units, except for the ground breaking work of Nancy Kurshan and Steve Whitman of the Committee to End the Marion Lockdown (CEML) and the many prisoners who reached out to the AFSC, which, in 1985 produced a pamphlet called “The Lessons of Marion”. We began hearing from people throughout the country saying that they were prisoners being held in extended isolation for political reasons. We also heard from jailhouse lawyers, Islamic militants and prisoner activists many of whom found themselves locked down in 24/7 solitary confinement. The AFSC began contacting people inside and outside the prisons to see who was interested in organizing. People that we’ve known, worked with and loved have been, and some still are, being held in this manner. Some of those people were actively involved in the different political movements of the 60’s and 70’s and understood how control units were being used against us all. Getting issues of isolation and torture into the light has been a long road and I bow in gratitude to those inside who so gracefully and patiently mentored those of us on the outside.

In 1996, the National Campaign held four Regional Hearings across the country, giving voice to people in prison, ex-prisoners, family members, advocates, lawyers and others whom were impacted by the use of isolation. In 1997 we came out with the Interim Report which held data on the emergence of over 45 control units or supermax prisons in almost every state. We matched inside and outside monitors in each state and formed the testimonies we received into a Listening Project called “Testimonies of Torture” and the “Survivor’s Manual”. In 1998, the National AFSC folded the work of the Campaign into Newark, NJ’s Prison Watch Project of the New York Metropolitan Regional Office. During the four years of its existence, NCSCUP trained dozens of students in organizing principles, including helping to develop about half a dozen campus Prisoner Awareness groups. Many of those former students are still working for social change today.

The history of the National Campaign to Stop Control Unit Prisons really began with the movements of the 60’s and 70’s. My generation belonged to a society where we genuinely believed that each of us was free to dissent politically. In those years, people acted out this belief in a number of ways. Native peoples contributed to the formation of the American Indian Movement dedicated to self determination; Puerto Ricans joined the movement to free the island from US colonialism; white students formed the Students for a Democratic Society and other groups, while others worked in the southern Civil Rights movements. This was also a time that the Black Panther Party for Self Defense was formed, as well as a time where there was a distinct rise in the prisoner’s rights movement. It was time when television news had graphic pictures of State Troopers, Police, the FBI, and the National Guard killing our peers. It was a time when I saw on the evening news the bullet holes fired by police into Panther Fred Hampton’s sleeping body, a time when young people protesting the Viet Nam War died on the Jackson and Kent State campuses killed by the National Guard, a time when civil rights workers were killed with impunity, and a time when we felt as if there was no opportunity to stop mourning because each day another activist was dead. These killings and other acts of oppression led to underground formations such as the Black Liberation Army and the Weathermen Underground.

The government, in response to this massive outcry against social inequities and for national liberation, utilized an FBI Counter Intelligence Program called COINTELPRO, which had as its objective the crippling of the Black Panther Party and other radical forces. Over the years that this directive was carried out, many of those young people who weren’t murdered were put in prisons across the country. Some, now in their 60’s and 70’s are still there. Those directives are still being carried out, only now we have an entire office of Homeland Security monitoring what it calls “radical prisoners”.

While the US denied that there were people being held for political reasons, there was no way at the time, to work with prisoners without hearing repeatedly of the existence of such people, including individuals who clearly fit the United Nations definition of political prisoners and prisoners of war and the particular treatment they endured once in prison. As early as 1978, Andrew Young, who was US Ambassador to the United Nations, was quoted in newspaper interviews as saying that “there were hundreds, perhaps thousands of people I would describe as political prisoners” in US prisons.

Across the nation, we saw an enhanced use of sensory deprivation/isolation units for such people, and it was this growing “special treatment” which we began monitoring. At the time, Ralph Arons, a former warden at Marion, was quoted at a congressional hearing as saying, “The purpose of the Marion Control Unit is to control revolutionary attitudes in the prison system and in society at large”.

For those of us who have been in the struggle for decades, the deliberate use of long term sensory deprivation is haunting. People that we’ve known, worked with and loved have been, and some still are, being held in this manner. Some of those are people in the audience today. The names Ojore Lutalo; Sundiata Acoli, who was one of the Marion Brothers, Corey Weinstein of California Prison Focus, Alejandro Molina from the Puerto Rican Cultural Center, students from Oberlin College, young people across the country who belonged to the Anarchist Black Cross, the United Church of Christ, Yaki Owusu of Spear and Shield, the input of the women held in small group isolation at Lexington, Ky. and many others who gave strength and purpose to the work. Some of these people were actively involved in the different political movements of the 60’s and 70’s and understood how control units were being used against us all. Getting issues of isolation and torture into the light has been a long road and I bow in gratitude to those inside who so gracefully and patiently mentored those of us on the outside.

In 1996, the National Campaign held four Regional Hearings across the country, giving voice to people in prison, ex-prisoners, family members, advocates, lawyers and others whom were impacted by the use of isolation. In 1997 we came out with the Interim Report which held data on the emergence of over 45 control units or supermax prisons in almost every state. We matched inside and outside monitors in each state and formed the testimonies we received into a Listening Project called “Testimonies of Torture” and the “Survivor’s Manual”. In 1998, the National AFSC folded the work of the Campaign into Newark, NJ’s Prison Watch Project of the New York Metropolitan Regional Office. During the four years of its existence, NCSCUP trained dozens of students in organizing principles, including helping to develop about half a dozen campus Prisoner Awareness groups. Many of those former students are still working for social change today.

The history of the National Campaign to Stop Control Unit Prisons really began with the movements of the 60’s and 70’s. My generation belonged to a society where we genuinely believed that each of us was free to dissent politically. In those years, people acted out this belief in a number of ways. Native peoples contributed to the formation of the American Indian Movement dedicated to self determination; Puerto Ricans joined the movement to free the island from US colonialism; white students formed the Students for a Democratic Society and other groups, while others worked in the southern Civil Rights movements. This was also a time that the New African Independence Movement reasserted itself, the Black Panther Party for Self Defense was formed, as well as a time where there was a distinct rise in the prisoner’s rights movement. It was time when television news had graphic pictures of State Troopers, Police, the FBI, and the National Guard killing our peers. It was a time when I saw on the evening news the bullet holes fired by police into Panther Fred Hampton’s sleeping body, a time when young people protesting the Viet Nam War died on the Jackson and Kent State campuses killed by the National Guard, a time when civil rights workers were killed with impunity, and a time when we felt as if there was no opportunity to stop mourning because each day another activist was dead. These killings and other acts of oppression led to underground formations such as the Black Liberation Army and the Weathermen Underground.

The government, in response to this massive outcry against social inequities and for national liberation, utilized an FBI Counter Intelligence Program called COINTELPRO, which had as its objective the crippling of the Black Panther Party and other radical forces. Over the years that this directive was carried out, many of those young people who weren’t murdered were put in prisons across the country. Some, now in their 60’s and 70’s are still there. Those directives are still being carried out, only now we have an entire office of Homeland Security monitoring what it calls “radical prisoners”.

While the US denied that there were people being held for political reasons, there was no way at the time, to work with prisoners without hearing repeatedly of the existence of such people, including individuals who clearly fit the United Nations definition of political prisoners and prisoners of war and the particular treatment they endured once in prison. As early as 1978, Andrew Young, who was US Ambassador to the United Nations, was quoted in newspaper interviews as saying that “there were hundreds, perhaps thousands of people I would describe as political prisoners” in US prisons.

Across the nation, we saw an enhanced use of sensory deprivation/isolation units for such people, and it was this growing “special treatment” which we began monitoring. At the time, Ralph Arons, a former warden at Marion, was quoted at a congressional hearing as saying, “The purpose of the Marion Control Unit is to control revolutionary attitudes in the prison system and in society at large”.

For those of us who have been in the struggle for decades, the deliberate use of long term sensory deprivation is haunting. People that we’ve known, worked with and loved have been, and some still are, being held in this manner. Some of those are people in the audience today. The names Ojore Lutalo; Sundiata Acoli, who was one of the Management Control Unit in NJ was built for in 1975; Assata Shakur, who was held for over five years in isolation. Marshall Eddie Conway, Albert Nuh Washington, who died in prison; Geronimo Pratt; Dhoruba Bin Wahad, Dr. Mutulu Shakur, Mumia Abu Jamal; Leonard Peltier, David Gilbert, Marilyn Buck, Sekou Odinga, Ray Luc Levassuer, Kazi Toure, Masai Ehehosi; Leonard Peltier, Oscar Lopez Rivera,
Alejandra Torres, Dyleia Pagan, Bashir Hameed, Standing Deer and Sekou Odin-
ga, Lorenzo Kom’boa Ervin; Richard Williams, Tom Manning, Merle and the rest of the
Africas, Africa, Susan Rosenberg, Lau-
ra Whitehorn, Linda Evans, Marilyn Buck,
Sylvia Baraldini, Mutulu Shakur, Imam
Jamil Al-Amin - these names and dozens of
others haunt the spaces of every control
unit, SHU, DDU, ad seg unit and special
housing unit in the country. No matter what
name they are given, their purpose is the
same as it is in Abu Ghraib or Guantanamo
the breaking of minds. For every name I’ve
read, there are a thousand more.

For people of my generation, this work
is done with a compelling and lifetime
passion and an understanding that the work
is not risk free. We’ve made a promise to
those dead and alive to abolish these torture
chambers. People throughout the world are
beginning to understand what the prisoners
have been saying to us for decades about the
oppressive tactics of the US govern-
ment. The department of corrections is
more than a set of institutions, it is a state
of mind. It is that state of mind which has
expanded the use of isolation, the use of
devices of torture and the Counter Intelli-
genence Program, as part of Homeland Secu-
ritv, against activists, both inside and out-
side the walls. Ojore Lutalo, the man who
first contacted us in 1986, was released
from the control unit via litigation in 2002
after 16 years in isolation. In 2004, he let us
know that he had been placed back into the
Management Control unit with no charges
pending or any explanation. When I called
the Department of Corrections, it took
many conversations before I was bluntly
told that this was upon the order of Home-
land Security, that he is one of a number of
prisoners across the country who they have
targeted in this way.

The latest progression of control units
are called “security threat group manage-
ment units”. This is particularly egregious
because it is the government which gets to
define what a “security threat group” is.
According to a national survey done by
the Department of Justice in 1997, the De-
partments of Corrections of Minnesota and
Oregon named all Asians as gangs, which
Minnesota further compounds by adding
all Native Americans. The State of NJ DOC
lists the Black Cat Collective as a gang.
The Black Cat Collective is my free fos-
ter son along with two friends who put on
Afro-Centric cultural programs in libraries.
Because my own background stems from
the Civil Rights Era, I am very mindful of
who is considered a “security threat” to this
country and how they are treated.

Prison gang policies occur within the
context of larger society and the wider
criminal justice system, and the growth of
security threat group management units are
part of the larger policy agenda regarding
US prisons. One of the standards that the
federal government sets in order for states
to receive prison construction subsidies is
to mandate the building of supermax pris-
on or security threat group management
units.

One of the things that makes this such an
exciting time to re-new our efforts through
Stopmax, is that we now have the growing
understanding of the validity United Na-
tions international law. The Convention
Against Torture, the Convention on the
Elimination of All Forms of Racial Dis-
 crimination, The UN Convention on Politi-
cal and Civil Rights and other international
and regional treaties help give us a new set
of legal, educational and organizing tools
for social change.

Our work this weekend is very rooted in
struggle against the system and political
oppression. It is deeply touching to me to
have representatives of so many long time
political formations present. Those of us in
AFSC rooted in these issues, continue to
hear from prisoner activists, the mentally ill,
people charged with being gang members
and thousands of others all being housed in
extended isolation where devices of torture
are used with impunity. After each Home-
land Security Code change, Prison Watch
is flooded with calls from people report-
ing loved ones with Islamic names being
placed in solitary without charges.

Our work this weekend is a time when
the building of new relationships and the
broadening of our base can truly create so-
cial change. I think we all need to be mind-
ful of the deep sense of grief that many of
us feel as it impacts on our work and in-
teractions. There may be groups here who
need to work through differences with one
another. There may be groups here who
can form working alliances no matter what
those differences are. Our priority has to be
to work cooperatively to shut down these
torture chambers.

I want to honor our foremothers and
forefathers in this movement for aboli-
tion of prisons, isolation and torture with
a poem of Assata Shakur’s called “No One
Can Stop the Rain”, which reminds us that
no one can stop a righteous movement. We,
all of us, are a powerful community of re-
sistance, and this is a dream come true for
me. ✤

No One Can Stop the Rain
By Assata Shakur
Watch, the grass is growing.
Watch, but don’t make it obvious.
Let your eyes roam casually, but watch!
In any prison yard, you can see it,
growing.
In the cracks, in the crevices, between the
steel and the concrete,
Out of the dead gray dust,
The bravest blades of grass shoot up, bold
and full of life.
Watch, the grass is growing.
It is growing through the cracks.
The guards say grass is against the Law.
Grass is contraband in prison.
The guards say that the grass is insolent.
It is uppity grass, radical grass, militant
grass, terrorist grass,
They call it weeds.
Nasty weeds, nigga weeds, dirty, spic,
savage indian, wetback, pinko,
Commie weeds subversive!
And so the guards try to wipe out the
grass.
They yank it from its roots.
They poison it with drugs.
They maul it.
They rake it.
Blades of grass has been found hanging in
cells, covered with
Bruises, “Apparent suicides”.
The guards say that the “GRASS is
UNAUTHORIZED.”
“DO NOT LET THE GRASS GROW:”
You can spy on the grass. You can lock up
the grass.
You can mow it down, temporarily.
But you will never keep it from growing.
Watch, the grass is beautiful.
The guards try to mow it down, but it
keeps on growing.
The grass grows into a poem.
The grass grows into a song.
The grass paints itself across the canvas
of life.
And the picture is clear and the lyrics are
true,
And the haunting voices sing so sweet and
strong
That the people hear the grass from far
away.
And the people start to dance, and the
people start to sing, and the song is
freedom.
Watch the grass is growing.

NUMBER 31
BOOK REVIEWS

THE RED ARMY FACTION
By Ed Mead
A Documentary History by J. Smith and Andre Moncourt
Volume 1: Projectiles for the People

This soon-to-be-released book is about the Red Army Faction that operated in American-occupied Germany during the 1970s. It is a book that should be read by any serious student of anti-imperialist politics. “Volume 1: Projectiles for the People” provides a history of the RAF’s development through the words of its letters and communiqués. What makes the book especially important and relevant, however, is the careful research and documentation done by its editors. Their effort makes this work far more than a collection of communiqués. From this book you will learn the mistakes of a group that was both large and strong, but which (like our own home-grown attempts in this regard) was unable to successfully communicate with the working class of a “democratic” country on a level that met their needs. While the armed struggle can be the seed of something much larger, it is also another means of reaching out and communicating with the people. Students interested in this historic era would do well to study this book and to internalize both the successes and failures of one of the largest organized armed anti-imperialists organizations operating in Western Europe since World War II.

Source: www.kersplebedeb.com

ALL ALONE IN THE WORLD: CHILDREN OF THE INCARCERATED
By Nell Bernstein

Fourteen cities in this country have adopted a plan to help heal the wounds inflicted upon children from frequent and prolonged exposure to domestic violence and criminal activity by parents now incarcerated. Children need a great deal of support to cope with the trauma. CD-CP or Child Development- Community Policing programs have been instituted to change or transform the way police handle the arrest and the scene of the crime. Children are offered counseling and other services to reduce the trauma of parental arrests.

In All Alone, Bernstein reports on the work at the Children’s Center at Sing Sing in New York, La Bodega de la Familia in Manhattan’s East Side and several others. Each program finds as many ways as possible to open doors between child(ren) and parent to allow for positive changes, and for ways to aid in reconstructing these relationships. For example, some prisoners have been given access to parenting classes, while some prisons have child centers; a few even offer a quiet space for family gatherings, some offer family counseling. Combinations of services are in many institutions but there are no places where it is prison policy to have a thoughtful regard for these relationships.

Consideration for the child is still needed when prison assignments (location) are made. Phone calls should be cheaper for more frequent contact, and children need to be treated with respect by prison staff and their needs considered in visitation rooms and through the prison entry protocols.

Many steps to constructively rebuild these relationships need to happen during incarceration prior to reentry. This must be a part of a prisoner’s rehabilitation program.

Bernstein has talked with children and young people all over America and has come to one inescapable conclusion: each decision we make on how to handle lawbreakers-from arrest protocols through sentencing through policies governing the prospects of returning prisoners - affects children’s lives in deep and lasting ways. Many of the things we worry about on behalf of the children - poverty, single or no parent families, homelessness, unemployment, juvenile delinquency - are exacerbated by, if not directly attributable to, parental incarceration.

Comment from the reviewer: For those who go before the Board of Prison Terms for a parole hearing please note - they are very interested in your work and effort to repair damage in your family. Keep track of the work you do, the letters you have written, the response from family members. Note change that shows your own maturing visible by a drop off or lack of incidents. Rehab in California prisons really falls on your shoulders.
Letters .................. Continued from page 2

Many whites in NY prisons grow up in the same neighborhoods, lived in the same life style and had the same challenges in life as the other races. Yet in prison whites often hear its “all their fault.”

I can agree with Ed about all the war crimes America has committed over the years. But to blame only whites for war deaths is foolish when so many horror stories can be heard from countries all around the world.

Will Ed and the rest of the “Blame White Folks” crowd still blame whites when/if Obama is elected president and continues the same imperialistic/capitalistic policies this system is so well known for?

Yet I do agree with Ed in one other regard as do a few from the other races I’m around. We are prisoners and we should stick together. However, Ed’s Comments “On Racism” by calling only white people “racist” just causes more divisions. Not all whites are racists or agree with this system as Ed surely knows.

Chris Slavin, Stormville, NY

ED RESPONDS: Thanks for your letter Chris. Yes, I could have written that section better. We need the input from prisoners like you who have genuine questions in terms of the road ahead. I too have done time in eastern prisons where whites were a minority. In fact, I was one of the “white, blue-eyed devils” Black Muslim prisoners seem to hate so much back in the early days.

I suggest you ask yourself what is the primary contradiction preventing prisoners from unifying against their common enemy? I think you will conclude that it is racism. If that’s what’s standing between us prisoners and solidarity, then it is our duty to fight it. Just as we cannot expect women to educate men around the issues of sexism, so too we cannot expect people of color to educate whites around the issue of racial oppression.

As a white you are a racist, as am I, just as a male makes all men sexist. You cannot be raised in this capitalist culture without being infected by its sicknesses. Recognizing this enables you to take political responsibility not only for your own racism and sexism, but also to combat the racism within your own ranks. For white prisoners it is a dangerous and difficult job, yet it is the responsibility as a politically conscious white prisoner to do so. This obstacle to forward progress must be defeated.

You ask if my “crowd [will] still blame whites when/if Obama is elected president and continues the same imperialistic/capitalistic policies [off this system]?” First, it is not about “blame,” it’s about racism.

As for Black racism, I agree with the comments of George Jackson, who said there is no such thing as Black racism. Those who have been the victims of racism are not likely to impose that level of oppression on others. Rather what whites perceive as black racism is nothing other than a healthy defense reaction to white racism.

Regarding whites being the blame for this and for that, as you are hearing around you from black prisoners, they are right. Admit it. Your duty as a progressive white prisoner is to combat white racism—it is your obligation. The first step in the path to forward progress is to defeat those elements who seek to divide prisoners—whether it is by gender, sexual orientation, or race. These backwards elements are serving the interests of the pigs to divide us. The toll you must pay to be a white prisoner activist is to be a race traitor—embrace that name and join the forces of progress.

I’ve faced death for doing such things as attempting to integrate a segregated prison mess hall by having black prisoners come and eat at my table one meal, and then me eating at their tables the next. I am not asking anyone to do anything I have not put my life on the line doing myself. What I have also found is that shame will bring the racists groups around. I have many stories to tell about this, but suffice it to say that if you create a struggle, a point of conflict, the racists will ultimately join the progressive forces (after first trying to stop any struggle from happening).

SARA JANE OLSEN’S RELEASE AND RE-ARREST

Dear Prison Focus:

I just wish to voice myself about the recent release and rearrest of Sarah Jane Olson by the powers that be. First and foremost, as a resident of South Central Los Angeles and someone who became privy to the mechanisms of the LAPD then and now, I would say that I was surprised to hear that Sarah Jane even had a release date. I also would never even remotely allow myself to believe that her release was an accident. As should be public knowledge now, the CDCR is being scrutinized for the faulty medical treatment that is being provided to prisoners for decades at the expense of thousands of lives, and the subject of overcrowding and whether or not lower level prisoners should be released.

We (the conscious) continue to proceed in the direction of seeking a better tomorrow have to know and understand that it will be us that will be sacrificed and not the public officials who are at fault or made mistakes by choosing profit over the reduction of the prison population. If you have a voice that beckons to be heard, and is being heard, be aware because you always can become the next scapegoat for the state’s machine.

Brian Hill, Corcoran

GREETINGS FROM ATTICA

Dear Prison Focus:

I’m writing to you because I’m a prisoner (I use the word prisoner because I’m being held here against my will) in a New York State Department of Corrections facility, currently housed in the SHU here at Attica. This place is foul, cruel, torturous, and a hell hole. They house a bunch of mental health patients here that don’t need to be confined; they need help and the guards are not equipped to deal with them so they are starved, splashed with cold water, kept frozen by windows being left open, violated and disrespected.

The showers are very unclean and there is dirt and mildew and whatever else caked on. We are forced to shower bare footed in the filth. You are not allowed to buy your own toothpaste and they only have small tubes that don’t do anything for your health patients here that don’t need to be medical treatment that is being provided.

Everyone that comes through here is beat badly and do not receive medical attention.

Please keep doing what you do for the people like me that are stuck in the SHU!

James K. Bell aka Baby Sundiata Shakur, Attica, NY

WAKE UP YOUNG PRISONERS!

Dear Prison Focus:

I’m writing in response to Gabriel Reyes’ writing in the spring 2008 (no. 30) issue of Prison Focus. I’ve been incarcerated on and off in California since 1979. I’ve been
down on this one for 13 years. Let me begin to respond to Reyes and his belief that prisoners are actually doing something concerning their struggle.

Until everyone stops destroying one another, nothing will change. You don’t have a clue about solidarity! California prisons are simply full of drug addicts, baby gang bangers who serve no purpose besides doing CDCR’s work.

On my way back from court, I was put in D.V.I. AD-Seg unit for seven months where I saw many things like 20-year-old shot callers, and a population on psych meds.

People are fighting the wrong battle. CDCR has taken everything—they even parents, sad to say, but this is my analysis. Asian, or Indian. Most see prison guards as no structure among white, black, brown, aggression to keep division amongst the ing with different races, perpetuate acts of the over-all attitudes of staff, who interact-oner psychologists, psychiatrists, and ad-

In Reyes’ closing he made an appeal to get friends and family to organize. But I say, the organization must take place within! Just see how the three strike amendment fell way short of the signatures needed—organizing must take place at the core.

Alcedo M. Melonson Jr.

ANOTHER RESPONSE
Dear Prison Focus:

I read Ed’s response to Gabriel Reyes in the spring 2008, about gang leaders. The majority of them do not have regard for their people, or the life on the streets. They are infatuated by fantasy, and sustained by the spring 2008, about gang leaders. They have been their worst enemy and can blame no one but ourselves and the outdated belief systems which we seem to cling to for status and comfort. Not just our bodies, but our minds are chained and held captive as well. As a consequence most of us are blind. We can’t see things as they really are; we can't understand the issues that are really important to us. As a result many of us will live, struggle, and die in these prison cells with a hope that never materialized and a life-illusion which kept us hoping.

Wake up brothers … no matter what race or creed, because like Earth Wind and Fire said, “that’s all in the head, whether you wanna believe it or not.”

Robert, HDSP

OUR OWN WORST ENEMY
Dear Prison Focus:

First of all, I’d like to compliment you on the P.F. #30 and a job well done.

Secondly, I’d like to comment on a touchy subject and some of the things with Mr. Grinch wrote about because he is either self-deceived or resides in an entirely differ-ent CDCR than I do.

I’ve been in the California Department of Corrections (and now Rehabilitation) since 1982. I was 18 years wise and walked into a race war of unknown origins. Since then, I have been involved in and know the de-tails regarding the flashpoint of several race conflicts, and none of them were predicated on drugs. Yes, drugs are prevalent in prison and do affect us over all in that they keep us asleep and our creative energy dormant. But the real culprits, and you know it, are individual belief systems which are based on race and separation and, as long as these are in place, we are basically shorthanded and out matched.

As Ed points out in his response to Mr. Grinch, a dialog is definitely in order. But first we must be honest with ourselves and others if we want to tackle the real issues and make some actual progress. Over the past 20 years paroling for lifers has been like defending oneself all over again against the very charges that first sent us to prison. We have lost nearly all of our privi-leges and those retained have been watered down. We once had weights, cameras, and family visits for all, even while in the SHU. We had boxing rings, along with basket-ball and football teams who competed with teams from the streets. Then there was Red rose Productions who produced concerts with musicians that we can now only hear on the radio. All gone!

We have been our own worst enemy and can blame no one but ourselves and the outdated belief systems which we seem to cling to for status and comfort. Not just our bodies, but our minds are chained and held captive as well. As a consequence most of us are blind. We can’t see things as they really are; we can’t understand the issues that are really important to us. As a result many of us will live, struggle, and die in these prison cells with a hope that never materialized and a life-illusion which kept us hoping.

Wake up brothers … no matter what race or creed, because like Earth Wind and Fire said, “that’s all in the head, whether you wanna believe it or not.”

Robert, HDSP
with 500 impassioned volunteers working nights, weekends and when possible, weekdays ‘til their voices gave out and their back’s ached, FACTS still fell far short of the number of signatures needed to qualify “The Three Strikes Reform Act of 2008” for the ballot. If heart, energy and passion could have put us over the top, we’d have sailed through, but the fact is, you must have money (over $1 million) and/or far more than 500 volunteers.

FACTS worked through the criticisms of other organizations who claimed we collected millions of dollars and had nothing to show for it, through the frequent name calling by prisoners who could not understand why we would promote such a weak initiative. Of course, those who followed our efforts from the beginning would know that we always promoted the strongest reform possible, with many of us advocating for abolishing the law in its entirety. Reality is a hard lesson. What seems not to be understood by those who felt betrayed by us was that in order to undertake a fight for abolition or substantive reform, we would need many thousands in the fight with us and many millions in our campaign fund. Most of the monies raised this year went into our campaign account to support the ballot effort. So, while some were questioning what we did with “all” the money we raised, we were struggling to keep the doors open. Our staff now numbers 2 ½, and we found ourselves without the funds to hire an executive director.

I’m not trying to dish out blame, I just want all who personally suffer the most from this insanely punitive law to know that we give it all we’ve got in every way possible, and every time another organization or individual planted seeds of doubt in your minds or you questioned our integrity, we lost support and our efforts were further crippled. Imagine if the loved ones of all 4,500+ nonviolent strikers agreed to not only work in the campaign, but pledged a minimum of $5.00 a month, imagine, how much further we could go. Think now of other funders who would see an effort that generated support from among its own— they would be inspired to give to a winning effort. Let’s do a little math: 4500 x $5/ month x 12 months = $270,000. Now you have another 100 out here who give $20/ month x 12 months and you have another $24,000, and so on. If those most affected expect someone else to support their cause when they only half-heartedly support it themselves, they are fooling themselves to their own detriment. Those of you who know me, at least from what I have written, should know that I have one agenda, which is to see this law compromised, a step at a time if that is necessary.

Recently FACTS held a meeting on how to engage members in an open discussion about the future of our work. Many great ideas came out of the meeting including an emphasis on the need to unify other groups involved in prison reform for the common cause of changing this unjust law. We know that we cannot do this alone. Your support along with that of your friends, loved ones, and the community is crucial. Many thanks to Prison Focus for giving us the opportunity to give you all a report.

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by public opinion - and must be stopped”, says Daniel Hazen Torture Survivor and organizer with StopForce.

The sentencing of juveniles to Life Without Parole (LWOP), for example, would arguably contravene international anti-torture law. According to research by Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International, there are at least 2,225 child offenders serving LWOP in U.S. prisons. The majority of these inmates (59 percent) are first-time offenders. Such sentences, which effectively mean death by incarceration, violate international human rights law as well as the principles of fairness and justice that should underpin the U.S. criminal justice system.

The indiscriminate use of TASERs by law enforcement - and a series of deaths that have resulted - is another example of torture that would fit under the broader definition. Rather than a substitute for lethal force as the devices were intended, TASERs are routinely used to incapacitate suspects deemed unruly or simply uncooperative. In its final report on U.S. compliance with the Convention Against Torture in May of 2006, the U.N. Committee Against Torture noted that the extensive use of TASERs “raises serious issues of compatibility” with the Convention.

The Committee noted that many of these same concerns were the subject of its previous review in 2000, but that the problems had persisted without resolution.

Rather than arguing the fine points of what constitutes “cruel, inhuman or degrading,” as U.S. officials have often done, a more enlightened approach would be to address these problems at their source and bring US practice in line with objective international standards. Anything less would undermine U.S. credibility on the subject at a most critical juncture. “It is important that defenders of human rights in the U.S. express our fundamental solidarity with all victims of torture and ill treatment in this country and around the world,” Baraka says. “This day reminds us of our moral responsibility to demand that the humanity of marginalized and vulnerable individuals and groups is recognized and protected by all governments, under all circumstances.”

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**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).

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**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.

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**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.

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**PRISON FOCUS 2008**

Prison Focus #32 will be about the future of prisons. Please send your articles and artwork. Due date for submissions for the next issue is 10/01/08. If you have ideas for issue #33 send them in to us as well.

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**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 tortuous 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

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