

Coalition For Prisoners' Rights Newsletter

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July 2009

ABOUT TORTURE: Triumph of the Human Spirit

Both acceptance and the ignorance of many people in the U.S. of a variety of forms of torture are no accident. They are the result of years of work by the corporate media and the people in power whom they serve.

An article entitled "Hellhole", in the March 30, 2009, of *The New Yorker* magazine dealt with solitary confinement as a form of torture and received more attention than torture often does.

So-called extended lockdown is now an almost routine part of the U.S. prison system, even though it has been denounced by Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch and the United Nations Commission on Human Rights, among others.

"Hellhole" included many powerful quotes, starting with one from John McCain: "It crushes your spirit and weakens your resistance more effectively than any other form of mistreatment." Continuing with: "simply to exist as a normal human being requires interaction with other people," "whether in Walpole or Beirut or Hanoi, all human beings experience isolation as torture," and "without sustained social interaction, the human brain may become as impaired as one that has incurred a traumatic injury."

The truth of these statements is important for many reasons, most especially because the United States now holds at least 25,000 imprisoned people in isolation in supermax prisons. An additional 50,000 to 80,000 are kept in restrictive segregation units. This use of isolation is almost exclusively a phenomenon of the past 20 years. About a third of those held in solitary confinement develop acute psychosis with hallucinations. Markers of vulnerability not by Stuart Grassian, a Boston psychiatrist include: a history of seizures, serious mental illness, mental retardation, illiteracy, attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder.

Other countries use different methods in prisons to provide discipline and

prevent violence--the two most common reasons given for the use of solitary confinement in U.S. prisons. For example, Britain has focused on preventing prison violence rather than increasing the punishments employed after it has occurred. They reduced isolation, created smaller units and offered opportunities for work, education and special programming. Now, in all of Britain, there are fewer prisoners in "extreme custody" than there are in the U.S. state of Maine. Similarly, the 2006 U.S. *Report of the Commission on Safety and Abuse in American Prisons* noted that beyond about 10 days of isolation practically no benefits can be found and the harm is clear.

In this country, knowledge of successful methods of survival of long-term isolation remain a practical matter for thousands. Many find physical exercise, elaborate mental exercise (even plans for escape), or prayer helpful. Navy P.O.W. researchers found that the instinct to fight back against the enemy, which maintained a sense of purpose, constituted the most important coping mechanism.

We are fortunate to have many positive, productive examples of survival of solitary confinement, although at great cost. Among the most dramatic are those of the Angola 3: Herman Wallace and Albert Woodfox with 37 years survival each and Robert King with 29 years.

A C.P.R. survivor reminds us: "Solitary is what you make it! It's up to you whether or not you win. They will try to take everything that they can away from you. They start with simple things, physical things (mattress, blanket, food, phone, mail). What they want is your power, your dignity, your self-respect, your morals, your scruples, your Spirit. Discipline yourself. Learn to make do with nothing. Make yourself strong and you shall overcome."

UN CAMBIO DIFICIL PERO NECESARIO

El boletín de La Coalición de los Derechos de los Presos (C.P.R. por las siglas en inglés) esta atravesando su mayor y mas difícil cambio desde sus inicios en 1976. En los últimos años hemos acumulado una deuda de \$25,000.00 y debemos empezar a pagar y para que la deuda no siga creciendo nos vemos en la penosa necesidad de suspender la publicación gratuita de nuestro boletín mensual. Continuaremos enviando listas de recursos e información a aquellos que lo soliciten, también incluiremos una hoja abreviada de nuestro boletín (¡esta!) con la información mas relevante del mes. Seguiremos haciendo lo humanamente posible por mantener la precisión de nuestro boletín.

Por favor si cambia de domicilio, envíenos su nueva dirección. No podemos agregar nuevos nombres a la lista ya existente, sin embargo mantendremos sus cartas en nuestros archivos para un futuro. Estaremos comunicándonos con ustedes tan seguido como nos sea posible.

La Coalición ha venido publicando el boletín mensualmente, respondiendo la correspondencia, contestando cartas con requerimientos especiales, y enviando información através de una variedad de presentaciones publicas.

En la Coalición trabajamos un grupo de aproximadamente 24 personas de todo el tiempo. Algunos de nosotros en algun momento hemos estado presos, algunos otros son familiares de presos, pero todos estamos realmente preocupados por los derechos humanos en nuestro país.

Nuestra Coalición trabaja alrededor de una larga mesa de una sala familiar, por ese motivo no pagamos renta. Nosotros hemos existido por mas

This 2 page version of the CPR monthly newsletter will be included in every response to correspondence we send out. Others who would like to receive it must send us a stamped, self-addressed envelope (up to 12 at one time) for every issue they would like to receive.

We are relieved to report that we have reduced our debt by approximately \$9,000, leaving \$16,000 to go. After that is taken care of, we will begin to work on raising the money necessary to resume publishing the free, 8-page, bulk-mailed monthly newsletter, which costs us \$2,000 to \$3,000 per month.

We are currently planning to send out our yearly holiday card/calendar to our updated, but not expanded, mailing list.

de 34 años con un presupuesto raquítico pero con una enorme determinación. * *

Originalmente enviábamos nuestro boletín con estampilla de primera clase, a menos de 100 personas al mes; sin embargo nuestro boletín de mayo del 2009 fue por 9,142 personas, la mayor parte presos.

Nuestra tarea es ardua, recibimos un promedio de 500 cartas al mes para contestar con información, y lo seguiremos haciendo.

El apoyo a nuestra Coalición viene de donaciones individuales, (en especie y en efectivo), aportaciones económicas de comunidades de fe y de algunas pequeñas contribuciones de fundaciones progresistas.

Mientras nuestro trabajo aumenta, nuestras fuentes de recursos se empequeñecen. Esto es parte de los cambios en nuestro país por los últimos 30 años donde, consistentemente, los pobres si vuelven mas pobres, y los ricos mas ricos. La crisis financiera actual solo ha venido a empeorar una situación que ya vivimos.

Nuestro boletín podrá seguir funcionando únicamente si nuestros lectores nos apoyan económicamente para reducir la deuda. Estampillas postales y contribuciones monetarias son ampliamente bienvenidas.

Nosotros creemos firmemente que el sistema presidiario de este país y quienes lo subsidian actúan a la inversa; en vez de crear mayor seguridad, la seguridad es menor cada día.

Nosotros seguimos hacer todo lo posible por cambiar esto. Por favor únase a nosotros.

En solidaridad

**La Coalición de los Derechos
de los Presos**

**VOICES FROM INSIDE - MAY 14, 2009
San Quentin CA**

Unity in Masses fights against all forms of Capital Punishment. We are looking for artists and writers on Death Rows (& LWOP). We plan to place contributions on a website we will set up. We need your support: Unity in Masses PO Box 1105, 67564 Osthofen, Germany. (postage: 98 cents)

Livingston TX- Polunsky Unit

Inmates and officers alike are being placed in stifling, life endangering, inhumane treatment situations daily in the hot, overcrowded dining hall, due to ranking officers violating its capacity up to three times the set capacity of 112. (signed by 34 prisoners)