

Coalition For Prisoners' Rights Newsletter

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May Day 2013

SOLIDARITY & SOLITARY

Tamms Supermax in southern Illinois finally closed in January, 2013. Some of the prisoners there had been in solitary confinement for more than ten years. The prison had become notorious for its brutal treatment of prisoners with mental illnesses and for driving sane prisoners to madness and suicide.

The major opposition that delayed the closure of Tamms for many months as its closure altogether was also opposed, was the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME). This battle is just one example of actions taking place around the country: otherwise progressive unions are taking reactionary positions supporting the continuance of mass incarceration. They especially support solitary confinement, the most labor-intensive form of imprisonment.

AFSCME has more than 1.6 million members nationwide with 85,000 prison employee members, has played an important part in developing the trade union movement among public employees. In the 1960s and 70s, AFSCME's position was that workers' rights and human rights were inseparable. Today, in contrast, AFSCME fights to keep prisons open even when no jobs appear to be at stake. For example, from the start, all of the union's members working at Tamms were guaranteed placement in other prisons. The union, however, took the position that conditions at Tamms--widely denounced as cruel, inhumane, and ineffective--were necessary to maintain prison safety and security, as well as to keep jobs in southern Illinois.

The other three largest national unions that represent prison employees are: the Service Employees International Union (SEIU), with about 25,000 guard members); the American Federation of Government Employees (AFGE); and the Teamsters. In addition, prison employees in a number of state prison systems, and even some local jail systems, have

independent unions of their own. The best known is probably the California Correctional Peace Officers Association (CCPOA) whose membership grew from 5,000 to 31,000 from 1982 to 2011. There are also the New York State Correctional Officers and Police Benevolent Association (NYSCOPBA) and the Correction Officers Benevolent Association (COBA) of New York City.

Prison employees' unions focus on protecting jobs. In some cases, this has led to taking positions shared with prison reformers. Both are against prison overcrowding and understaffing. And both oppose for-profit prisons. The SEIU states: "For-profit companies reduce safety, bring down standards, and have corrupt relationships with politicians."

The major ugly contradiction, unfortunately, is that preserving jobs generally means keeping as many people as possible in prison for as long as possible. These days, unions fight against prison closures and programs that would divert those with prison sentences into treatment programs and other alternatives to incarceration. Unions have frequently opposed changes that could be seen as lessening their members' power or autonomy, such as oversight aimed at reducing abuses by guards and other prison officials.

Several unions resisted the growing movement against long-term and indefinite isolation. One way the biggest unions have done this is by simply not taking a position on solitary confinement. But in local struggles against solitary, unions have generally taken positions in favor of maintaining extreme isolation practices, such as AFSCME's position regarding Tamms.

It is a tragedy that working people and those temporarily out of the work force are now pitted against each other.

Resource: Solitary Watch

P O Box 11374, Washington DC 20008

Eugene V. Debs during World War I

While there is a lower class,
I am in it.
While there is a criminal element,
I am of it.
While there is a soul in prison,
I am not free.

--from Deb's hearing on November 18, 1918, when he was sentenced to 10 years for urging resistance to the draft.

Debs was a U.S. union organizer and leader, one of the founding members of the Industrial Workers of the World, and the Socialist Party's candidate for president five times from 1900 to 1920, the last time from a prison cell in Atlanta, when he received 3.4% of the vote. He had received 6% in 1912. When Debs was released from the Atlanta Federal Penitentiary, the other prisoners sent him off with "a roar of cheers," and a crowd of 50,000 people and band music greeted him on his return to Terre Haute IN.

"We have an established Permanent War State. We have military personnel in 177 countries around the world. Nobody knows how many are carrying out drone strikes"
--Hospitality, March 2013, Atlanta GA

New mailing address

Alliance of Incarcerated Canadians/Foreigners
in American Prisons
c/o NMB Inc.
131 Bloor St W, Suite 200
Toronto Canada M5S 1R8

To receive the Newsletter each month, send us self-addressed, stamped envelopes (with the CPR return address) --up to 12 at one time.

Keep sending us address changes and renewal requests, in order to receive the yearly holiday card/ new calendar.

Also, please note that the only address to use to be sure to reach us continues to be: PO Box 1911, Santa Fe NM 87504. We have discovered that there have been resource lists which, unfortunately, give out an incorrect address.

Remember: NONE OF US ARE LAWYERS OR LEGAL WORKERS for any "Legal Mail."

Many, many thanks to the Real Cost of Prisons Project for making our monthly Newsletter available on-line for free downloading and distribution. It is at: <http://www.realcostofprisonsproject.org/coalition.html> -- This is a GREAT site!

We continue to appreciate and to depend on readers' donations. Thank you.

Tras el maratón de Boston

Las Policías en Los Ángeles, Nueva York, Washington, y otras ciudades reforzaron sus medidas de seguridad tras las explosiones ocurridas el lunes durante el maratón de Boston.

El portavoz del alguacil del Condado de Los Ángeles, dijo que el departamento ha creado un centro de operaciones de emergencia, incrementó los patrullajes para la vigilancia del tránsito y otros puntos críticos, como los partidos de los Dodgers de Los Ángeles.

Mientras que en la ciudad de Nueva York, el jefe del Departamento de Policía, dijo que equipos de respuesta crítica han sido desplegados por toda la ciudad. Las autoridades han intensificado la seguridad en los hoteles y otros lugares prominentes.

Hasta en Londres la Policía de británica indicó que comenzaron a revisar los planes de seguridad para el maratón de Londres. Fue el próximo maratón internacional importante después de Boston.

VOICES FROM INSIDE

San Quentin CA March 13 2013

A lack of national protocol for the willing inmate to donate living vital organs and tissues is the norm. People die daily awaiting transplants, while some 2.3 million inmates are systematically denied the opportunity to make the ultimate restitution. We are committed to creating legislation for those whose bravery and dignity continue to inspire. We ask that you sign the online petition, Facebook.com/organsfrominmates Prisoners represent viable contributions to those in need.

Susanville CA March 28, 2013

Ad-seg prisoners' petition [summary]:

- 1) Allow us to possess a radio.
- 2) Access to an adequate law library.
- 3) No punishment with pending transfer.
- 4) Adequate and timely medical care.
- 5) Due process in 115 RVR hearings.
- 6) Provided adequate laundry exchange.
- 7) Canteen items received in packaging.
- 8) Education & rehabilitation programs.
- 9) Access to "property" every 120 days.
- 10) Tiers & showers sanitized.
- 11) Right to appeal of 602s.
- 12) We wish to be treated as humans.
- 13) No reprisals for our petitions.
- 14) Allowed personal tennis shoes.

We have high hopes of changes to a better living environment. To receive the basic things we're entitled to is our right.

[Received with 18 signatures.]