

Coalition For Prisoners' Rights Newsletter

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It Depends What You Think the Problem Is

May 1 -- International Workers Day

This article is for those who care about and work for advancing the interests of black and brown and all people of color, indigenous people, poor and working class people, women and LGBTQ people. Everyone who is suffering from the extreme lack of equality in the world and especially in our own country, the U.S.

Among our current misfortunes, a contributor to holding us back as we work to achieve positive change in our communities is the deep split among natural allies: workers and people currently imprisoned themselves--also workers. A painful example is a recent article by four union officials of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) in New Mexico.

There are some points in their article which, in fact, are true:
>there is a crisis with New Mexico's correctional system. By definition, the existence of the many large police, court and prison systems in our country is a crisis.
>PTSD should never be left undiagnosed or untreated. But this is common throughout the U.S., in the case of many from a variety of traumatic backgrounds.
>the time is right to address the underlying causes that result in the use of solitary confinement in prisons. The time is always right for this. The use of solitary confinement itself is an example of extreme misuse of a pervasive system of coercion and torture.
>systemic neglect is causing serious health and safety risks to those inside what are most often called "correctional facilities." Overwhelmingly this is happening to those detained in them.

Unfortunately, the whole framework of the article is such that the real problems are not even mentioned. Its point of view is to honor "the demanding work and sacrifices of correctional officers and correctional personnel nationwide."

The celebration of a day to honor and promote workers' rights began in the United States, and has since spread all over the world. Except in the U.S. It was first observed in Chicago, on May 1, 1886, as part of the long and painful struggle for the recognition of an eight hour day as a norm for workers. In the century and a quarter since, there has been a substantial amount of backsliding and decreasing union membership. Now there are many jobs--such as hospital workers and prison guards--where 12 hour days are the norm.

Still, the struggle for equity and improved working conditions continues. Today's strongest example is the push for a \$15 an hour "living wage."

Yet the NM AFSCME leaders seem totally unaware of the noble history of unity building among workers and all oppressed peoples. They also don't recognize that the size and composition of the prison population and conditions in prisons are much more the result of societal inequity with all its omnipresent injustices, especially racism, than of the alleged behavior of those imprisoned.

Although AFSCME states: "Across the state, we're seeing incidences of inmates falsely accusing corrections and detentions officers of assault skyrocket...many who are inside to serve long sentences have decided they have nothing better to do than imagine the officers as the enemy, and dream up ways to target them." That is a classic case of blaming the victim, which is getting to be an increasingly popular tactic. Like blaming those pesky poor people trying to leave behind, in unseaworthy boats, intolerable living conditions--for drowning in the Mediterranean. The poor people, the imprisoned mothers and children, are not the cause of their problems. The problem is how the few rich treat the many poor.

No one who has said it better than Bryan Stevenson: "The opposite of poverty is justice."

CRIME OF THE MONTH

You gotta hand it to the United States and Israel. Their effort to paint Iran as an imminent threat raises hypocrisy to an art form. Iran has never instigated a war of aggression against any country, EVER. The most recent war in which Iran was engaged was a defensive war against Iraq. In fact, the U.S. instigated that war and aided Iraq in using chemical weapons against Iran. The U.S. overthrew the democratically elected government of Iran in 1953 and installed a ruthless dictator, the Shah of Iran. In 1988, the U.S. shot down an Iranian airline, killing all 274 on board. Oops. What do you suppose would happen if Iran "accidentally" shot down a U.S. passenger plane?

The latest round of war mongering against Iran involves pressuring them to give up their so-called nuclear program. Both the CIA and Mossad (Israel's spy guys) have admitted that Iran suspended its nuclear weapons program years ago. Israel, which has a nuclear arsenal, never signed the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT) and refuses to allow inspections of its nuclear facilities. The U.S. has used nuclear weapons against civilian targets and has been in flagrant violation of the NPT for years. Iran signed the NPT in 1970 and has repeatedly allowed inspections of its nuclear facilities.

The Crime of the Month is the U.S. and Israel, two of the most belligerent nations on earth, accusing Iran of threatening world peace.

To receive our Newsletter by postal mail monthly, send us self-addressed, stamped envelopes (with the CPR return address)--up to 12 at one time.

Please continue to send us address changes and renewal requests, in order to be sent the yearly holiday card/new calendar each January.

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. There are resource listing which, unfortunately, use an incorrect address.

Remember: NONE OF US ARE LAWYERS OR LEGAL WORKERS. It is important not to mark any envelopes sent to us as "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 depend on our readers' donations & thank you for your support!; Mil gracias!

¡Ya basta con niños encarcelados!

Yo soy una madre que tuve que estar en esa prisión de Karnes City durante 5 meses (150 días) con mi hijo de 2 años de edad. Se muy bien cuales son las condiciones en ese lugar, sobre todo para los niños. ¿Cómo es posible que encarcelen a niños? Unos llegan de 6 meses--y salen ya cuando tienen mas que el año de edad. El niño que salio el día que sali yo, habia entrado en la carcel cuando tenia 6 meses, y salio de año y medio. El pobre estaba sorprendido--con la boca abierta de lo que veia: carros, vacas, caballos. A esa edad empezó a descubrir lo que desde pequeño hubiera podido hacer.

Gracias a Díos, mi hijo y yo salimos de ese horrible lugar, por la unión y solidaridad de todas las madres que decidimos comenzar un ayuno o huelga de hambre hace 15 días. Gracias a ello logramos llamar la atención de ICE y algunas madres recibimos una fianza para salir de ahi. Fianzas muy altas--en mi caso pagamos fianza de \$7500.

Desafortunadamente aún hay otras madres con sus hijos en ese lugar y por eso le pido a la Señora Sarah Saldaña, Directora de ICE, que haga los cambios necesarios para que no haya mas niños encarcelados. (La dirección es: U.S. Immigration & Customs Enforcement, 500 12th St SW, Washington DC 20036, 1-888-351-4024.)

--por Kenia Galeano

TO SILENCE

To silence the voice of prisoners is to leave the world ignorant of its most grievous faults, failures and transgressions.

Without the light that can only issue from the dungeon, humanity stumbles and falls, over and over again, into the same dark abyss.

--Alice Walker

INEQUALITY WIDENS

The United States now ranks 33rd as a country in which to raise children. And, all over the globe, preventable deaths of children are increasingly occurring in city slums. For example, Washington DC, the capital of the richest country in the world, ranks the worst in terms of infant deaths among 25 high-income global capital cities. In Washington, between seven and eight infants die out of 1,000 children. In Prague, Oslo, Stockholm and Tokyo, it is two out of 1,000 children.

In addition, in Cuba, Rwanda and Bolivia, women have a considerably more equal representation in their national legislatures than in richer countries.