

COALITION FOR PRISONERS' RIGHTS NEWSLETTER

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Schools - To - Prisons

There's a lot of talk these days about the need to improve our schools. President Clinton wants a corps of literacy volunteers. State governors want a variety of educational changes ranging from charter schools to tuition vouchers to more mandatory testing.

But they don't want to spend more on school budgets - because the big money increases are all going to their prison systems.

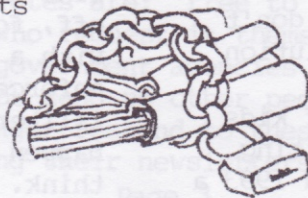
California is the most often-cited example of this shift in funding priorities for state governments. In 1995, for the first time, Californians paid as much for their prison system as they did for public colleges and universities. Since 1983, the number of people working for the California department of Corrections increased by 169%, while its higher education staff decreased by about 9%. In 1996, Pennsylvania's governor proposed

\$80.6 million in budget cuts for education, and an \$80.3 million increase for its prison system.

"The governor rejects the idea that the way you show support for education is increasing money," the Pennsylvania governor's press secretary explained. And, of course, there are a lot of ways to improve schools that don't cost money. But some of them do, like repairing deteriorating buildings and hiring more teachers to decrease class sizes. And the dramatic shift of money away from schools and to prisons is a clear statement of the priorities of our public officials.

One of the most bizarre examples of this trend is the conversion of educational facilities to prisons. In Waseca, Minnesota, the state university closed its branch campus in 1992. City officials

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SCHOOLS, CONT.

successfully lobbied the federal Bureau of Prisons to turn the campus into a minimum security prison, and it was reopened with the first shipment of prisoners in June of 1996. The town of Yankton, South Dakota, similarly bought a closed college campus and sold it to the Bureau of Prisons, which remodeled it as another minimum security prison. "It's almost a collegiate kind of atmosphere," the Yankton city manager said after the conversion.

School districts themselves are trying to close the gap between schools and prisons in some peculiar ways. In 1995, the Dallas, Texas, school district opened a new magnet school which was designed much like a prison. It has "37 surveillance cameras, 6 metal detectors, 5 full-time police officers" and "perimeter lights illuminate all public spaces and an 8-foot iron-pole fence seals off the school from an adjacent area." Union county, North Carolina, school officials opened up a classroom trailer on the grounds of the county jail this year. "Disruptive" students are transferred to the "alternative campus," where the constant sight of the jail is supposed to remind them where they can wind up if they don't pass their conflict-resolution class.

The growing number of kids we send to prison are getting less education there. In 1993 a

Justice Department report said that 45% of the facilities for juveniles don't meet minimal education standards recommended by the American Correctional Association. Many jails don't have teachers or books at all for the teenagers they warehouse. Other facilities have uncredentialed teachers, crowded classrooms, and limit students to 1 or 2 hours of class a day. Most educational programs that do exist for kids in jails and prisons don't provide credits that can be transferred toward a diploma.

Educational programs for adult prisoners are decreasing as the prison population grows. Congress cut off prisoners' access to grants for college education in 1994. State prison education funding decreased in 1993-94 from the year before.

Last spring, the Educational Testing Service reported that the most common finding of 20 years of research is that prisoners who have participated in education programs are more likely to be employed and less likely to end up back in prison than nonparticipants.

Our political officials often criticize the spending habits of countries they don't like and tell us we're better off, for example, than a country with a well-funded law enforcement system but an illiterate population. It can't happen here, we're supposed to think. But it is.

Death Penalty Victory

In an indictment unlike any before, 3 assistant prosecutors and 4 sheriff's deputies were charged in Illinois with conspiracy and obstruction of justice. They are believed to have been involved in fabricating evidence in the cases of Orlando Cruz and Alexandro Hernandez. One of the former prosecutors is now a Dupage County judge.

Cruz and Hernandez were convicted in 1985 and were just released from prison last year after spending years on death row. Cruz was 19 at the time he was sentenced to die; he is now 33. In setting Cruz free after his 3rd trial, the judge said the case against him was based on sloppy police work, mistakes and lies. Hernandez spent over 3 years on death row before his 2nd trial resulted in an 80 year sentence. He was also freed last year.

After the acquittal of Cruz, a grand jury was convened to

review the investigation and prosecution. In announcing the indictment against the law enforcement officials accused of lying and fabricating evidence, the special prosecutor said "In a free society there must always be a line between vigorous prosecution and official misconduct, between advocacy and unfairness, between justice and injustice. This indictment charges that line was crossed by 7 people."

Defense lawyers had long contended that investigators made up the testimony presented by the deputies that Rolando Cruz had told them a dream about the killing with details only the murderer would know.

Five men, including Cruz, have recently been released from death row in Illinois due to lack of evidence or possible innocence. Nearly 70 people have been released from death row nationwide since the 1970's.



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VOICES FROM INSIDE

WORKING FOR THE MAN

Ontario OR November 13, 1996

...What is the wage law concerning government construction contracts paid for by federal funding? As I understand it, Hoffman Construction is currently adding to the Snake River facility and using inmate labor that is subcontracted out to them. DOC receives from \$19 to approximately \$23/hour for each inmate who is then credited with \$3/day on their account. With an average of 21 working days a month, it does not take a rocket scientist to figure out that the DOC is pocketing over \$3,100 per inmate a month...

INFORMATION WANTED

Jesup GA November 18, 1996

Any federal inmate litigators who have a credible story of a retaliatory transfer for their having exercised their constitutional rights, and any attorneys who would be interested in representing such actions, either as a class action or as a Civil RICO matter, contact Ben Kalka through his attorney Christopher Cannon, 600 Harrison St., Suite 535, San Francisco CA 94107.

MOORISH SCIENCE TEMPLE VICTORY

Pendleton IN November 19, 1996

After 15 years of constant struggle and sacrifice, the Moorish Science Temple and the Indiana Department of Corrections (IDOC) entered into a settlement that was reached in a law suit...By February 1, 1997, the IDOC has to implement the terms of this agreement for the entire general population in all IDOC institutions where members of the Moorish Science Temple have requested services and where other equivalent groups are provided for.

On August 30, 1996, the Moors at Plainfield Corectional Facility were allowed to hold their first official Sunday School and Holy Day Services...

Any Moors within the IDOC who wish to receive a copy of this settlement, entitled Radford-El v. IDOC, Cause No IP94-1794-C-T/G, can obtain a copy upon specific request with 3 stamps for postage by contacting: Sis. D. Jackson-Bey, P.O. Box 88091, Indianapolis IN 46208.

Mailing list additions and address changes should go into effect within 2 months from their postmarked date; we don't have the resources to acknowledge these requests by letter. Requests for referrals and other correspondence will be answered within 4 to 6 weeks. Letters intended for publication must say "Do Print."

The Coalition makes information available on resources and services for prisoners. We strongly urge that readers keep copies of all papers, especially legal papers, sent to those offering assistance, and be careful about sending money. **In most cases we do not have direct experience with the quality or reliability of the services provided by the groups we mention.**

PROGRAMMING PROBLEMS

Indian Springs NV November 19, 1996

Nevada's parole chair, Donald Dension stated to the citizens of Nevada and the whole inmate population: "That if an inmate is not programming, going to school, or working, they will not make a parole." Since this statement was made, the Southern Desert Correctional Center has stopped most programs...There's no jobs here, and if you already have a high school diploma or GED, you can't go to school. Now where does this leave us?

MEDICAL PROBLEMS

Tennessee Colony TX November 21, 1996

The officials at the Coffield Unit take medical restrictions upon arrival for the sole purpose of putting us in the fields. What restrictions they do leave, they ignore. You are forced to work under duress, with loss of good time and possibly of parole. Anyone with information or who can help, please contact: Owen Scholes, 625592, Coffield Unit, Route 1, Box 150, Tennessee Colony TX 75884.

PRIVILEGE LOSS

Fond du Lac WI November 23, 1996

...Our prison is building a 150 bed barracks because of overcrowding. It's not known yet if it'll be medium or minimum, but there's no incentive or positive influence to want to better ourselves. As your security drops, you lose more privileges, like no privacy (149 other roommates possibly), property items, smoking among other things. It's a real scary thought to think about 150 inmates, not locked down, in one room. What's next?

TELEPHONE NEWS

Punta Gorda FL November 27, 1996

The FDOC has been engaging in a new telephone overcharging scheme perpetrated on Florida prisoners, families and their friends...In 1996,



VOICES FROM INSIDE continued

top DOC officials were caught in a bid rigging scandal...MCI is the company presently robbing families and friends of prisoners and these criminal activities have amounted to \$1.5 million in overcharges. The Florida Public Service Commission has recommended that the MCI and FDOC bandits refund the money stolen...

If there is anyone out there who has information on successful telephone litigation, or other information useful in pursuing a claim concerning the repressive policies of prisons' telephone systems, please contact me by writing Lakeith R-'Amir Sharif, 955 - 23rd Ave South, St Petersburg FL 33705-2947.

PELICAN BAY UPDATE

Crescent City CA December 8, 1996

Pelican Bay State Prison is continuing to violate state and federal court orders to change its form of prison administration which implements the use of cultivated prison informants, drop-outs and de-briefers to carry out physical assaults on prisoners they have on a "get-back" list for things such as: 1) Refusing to turn informant and spurning their attempts at fraternizing, 2) involvement in litigation or a member of an organization that litigates on behalf of prisoners' civil rights, 3) any prior convictions or present commitment offenses which involve assaults and batteries on police officers, custodial and correctional officers, 4) anyone suspected of being involved, actively or sympathetically, with groups or organizations which they deem to be "threat groups" or "prison gangs" and 5) prisoners who have political or religious beliefs and family members involved in, such as openly expressing and supporting those beliefs which the prison administration and its guards deem to be politically or religiously incorrect and not in acceptance with their forms of penalogical interests...

IT'S INJUSTICE

Imperial CA December 9, 1996

....Our battle is not Black vs. white or Black vs. Hispanic. It is injustice!!....

LAW LIBRARY POLICY

Limon CO December 9, 1996

....The law librarian at Limon Correctional Facility established a policy that in order to be eligible for a position as a clerk, all

Chicano prisoners seeking a job have to be fluent in Spanish. This policy does not pertain to white or Black prisoners seeking a position as a clerk. There is no need for them to know a second language. This policy is based on racism against the Chicano prisoners at Limon, by anti-immigrant staff...

BEHIND THE WALLS

Cheshire CT December 11, 1966

These guards are paid \$7 a day to buy their own meals, but they still eat state food and pocket the money. Here at Cheshire they feed prisoners in the cell blocks from dirty food carts and lukewarm food. They practice forced celling and fights or worse take place. On shakedown of cells, guards steal and break prisoners' things. Prisoners are constantly being treated for crabs and bug bites. This is a no-smoking prison, but guards smoke in front of us. The slop sinks are broken, so we have to get water and rinse mops in the shower. Division of Corrections has the biggest gang: they come running in packs of 30 (with dogs) to beat and cuff a prisoner...

BOARD APPOINTMENTS

Tehachapi CA December 15, 1996

I would like to advise the state of California prisoners that there is a case pending, Luparello et al. vs. Pete Wilson, Kern Superior Court case # 232693-RA, with a court status conference hearing scheduled for July 9, 1997...Luparello and 10 other life prisoners are suing governor Pete Wilson for negligence in duties when appointing commissioners to the Board of Prison Terms. Basically the lawsuit alleges Wilson appointed all law enforcement and victims' rights advocates to commissioner positions instead of a cross-section of the community...

Also, Kern Superior Court lawsuits are being filed by individual inmates against the panel of commissioners at a life consideration hearing for parole suitability. These individual lawsuits are alleging bias, rights violations to have a parole date fixed, infliction of undue hardship...

DOUBLE STANDARD

Shelton WA December 16, 1996

...I am a gay inmate who was whistled at by a homophobic staff member trying to make a jerk out of himself. I filed a grievance against the staff member for sexual harassment, and I had a witness. But during the "investigation" my witness was never questioned and the grievance response said: "No evidence of staff misconduct was found."

So let it be known, for the record, that the Washington State Department of Corrections has a double standard when it comes to sexual harassment. Inmates are always guilty, regardless of evidence. Staff members are always innocent, regardless of evidence.

CRIME OF THE MONTH

aka CrimeToppers

An increasing number of cities are sending the same message to their most vulnerable residents, the homeless: Get out of my way.

A homeless advocacy group surveyed the 50 largest cities in the U.S. and found that 75 percent have laws against panhandling, an increase of 13 percent from just two years go.

The survey by the organization, the National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty, also found that 38 percent began crackdowns on homeless people within the past several years.

Atlanta and San Diego were singled out for their policies of getting homeless people off the streets--Atlanta during the summer Olympic Games and San Diego during the Republican National Convention.

The advocacy group did find some bright spots in the nation's treatment of the homeless. Officials in Seattle have agreed to pay for a free public hygiene center, and the Miami area of Florida enacted a 1 percent tax on restaurant meals to raise money for buildings and services for the homeless.

On any one night, as many as 600,000 people may be sleeping in the streets, under bridges or in a field somewhere, according to government figures.

The "get-tough" treatment of these homeless people is our Crime of the Month. A nation that can afford golden parachutes for business executives can afford to give its most unfortunate residents a roof over their heads.



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