

Coalition For Prisoners' Rights Newsletter

Vol. 23, No. 11 P.O. Box 1911, Santa Fe, NM 87504-1911 November 1998

HATE CRIME ENHANCEMENT

We mustn't fall for easy answers even for terrible problems, and that often means we must disagree with popular solutions.

What is a "hate crime?" Hurting people. Hurting people is always bad. Even worse, if possible, is hurting people, not because they have hurt us or someone close to us, but simply because of who they are.

There are examples of hate crimes throughout history. Enslaving people is surely a hate crime. Yet it was very popular in what is now this country for several centuries. The common beliefs of those in power when slavery was popular would now be considered unacceptable social policy and behavior toward others with less power.

"Hate crime" legislation calls for longer sentences, known as sentence enhancements. Another

familiar area where court sentences are enhanced based on what the legal system considers the defendant to have been thinking or feeling at the time the crime was committed are sentences for killings.

If the court believes that the killing was done while the defendant had certain thoughts or feelings, the sentence will be enhanced. It can be enhanced to a set number of additional years in prison, to "natural life" (death by imprisonment), or to death itself.

Hate crime legislation is appealing at this point to many good people. Such legislation appears to take direct, relevant action against something awful. But beware! There is no sentence that has been shown to decrease killings in the future. There is no sentence that can bring back to

(continued on next page)

HATE CRIMES cont.

life someone who has been killed. There is no sentence that will change the way people are taught to look at others in society.

It is also just as important to remember: none of the many changes in sentencing laws that have occurred, especially since the late 1980s, have changed who is in prison in this country.

Who is in prison in this country, as we well know, are ever larger numbers of poor young men of color. Locking up such a large segment of many communities does not improve their lives or the lives of their families and communities now or in the future. It only continues and deepens the hurt, using a lot of taxpayers' money for a truly dead end purpose.

Hate crimes are bad. Hate crime enhancements are bad. What would help? Teachers who don't let words such as "nigger," "fag," or "cunt" go by unremarked and uncorrected. Legislatures that work to guarantee everyone's human rights. Courts that hold society's institutions such as schools, the military, and prisons accountable for what they do and do not do. Television sit coms that do not make jokes about members of groups that are discriminated against. Each of us taking responsibility for how we feel and act toward others who are different than we are.

We know as parents that what helps children act right, stand up

for their own rights, and respect the rights of others is mutual respect and endless, patient examples of how to act.

Society's problems and injustices are big and run deep. The solutions cannot be quick, easy or dirty. We must always remember that any solution to injustices takes hard work and constant alertness, not knee-jerk punishment.

Punishment as a method of social improvement has a well-established record of failure, of being ineffective, as well as being hurtful and expensive. We must not be misled into creating individual token, symbolic scapegoats for society's misdeeds.

Punishing the three who dragged a man to death, punishing the two who beat and hung another man to die on a fence will not change our everyday behavior with each other in a positive way.

True justice will only come from transforming society, together, one step at a time.

Resources

Fund for Human Dignity
666 Broadway, Suite 410
New York NY 10012
(212) 529-1600

ACLU
132 West 43rd St.
New York NY 10036
(212) 944-9800

CALIFORNIA FUNDS DEATH PENALTY "RESOURCE" CENTER

Texas may be the executing-est state in the country, but California has a bigger Death Row, and the state's death penalty opponents are gearing up for the likelihood that the pace of executions there is about to quicken substantially, according to a recent article in the New York Times.

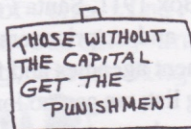
California now has 508 men and 9 women under sentence of death. Since 1976, when the U.S. Supreme Court cleared the way for state to resume executions, only five people have been put to death in California, far fewer than the 150-plus executions in Texas, where 16 people have been executed just this year.

Approximately 180 out of 517 death-sentenced prisoners do not have lawyers for their appeals and there is a four year waiting period to get one.

To expedite executions, the California legislature has funded a new state agency, the Habeas Corpus Resource Center, to recruit attorneys to death penalty defense. The agency, which hasn't started to function yet but is slated to begin soon. The Resource Center has been funded for a staff of 30 lawyers and an investigative unit. Its start-up budget of \$5 million also includes funds to hire 15 additional public defenders.

By creating the Resource Center, California hopes to meet the requirements of the Anti-Terrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act. The Act puts a one year limit on filing federal court appeals in capital cases. It is predicted that it will take five years to get attorneys assigned to the backlog of cases for current prisoners without attorneys, not including the 20-40 prisoners sentenced to death in California each year.

Political support for the death penalty in California is believed to be as strong as ever. It is difficult to find anyone in public office or seeking public office who is opposed to capital punishment. One of the few legislators to take a public stance against the death penalty is John Burton, a state senator and president pro tem of the senate. So far, there is little evidence that public sentiment is changing in California. Ironically, in Texas public opinion surveys have begun to reflect some movement away from the death penalty, a trend some attribute to the Karla Faye Tucker execution earlier this year.





VOICES FROM INSIDE

COLDLY, CRUELLY, COWARDLY

Iowa Park TX September 11, 1998

...This inhumanity of abuse makes a person wonder if we are really doing time within the United States of America. It also freaks many of us out as well to see and hear our own politicians get on and in the news and scream and yell about these other countrys' violations of human and civil rights. And then absolutely refuse to even acknowledge the very same things going on in the United States today...

PROMOTE SOCIAL JUSTICE AND HUMAN RIGHTS

Mineral Point MO September 23, 1998

Join the Missouri Prison Labor Union which seeks to organize the Missouri prisoners and their families, friends and supporters into a single body to promote social justice, human rights and the rights of the prisoners through legal, civil, moral and corporate means. Anyone who is willing to join or support the Missouri Prison Labor Union, please contact Jerome White-Bey, 37479, Potosi Correctional Center, Rt 2 Box 2222 (4A-11), Mineral Point MO 63660. Unity Now! Unity Forever!

HOW TO SPELL PRISON

Pendleton IN October 2, 1998

...The DOC here in Indiana has decided to privatize the commissary. So our orders will go from here, Indiana, to St. Louis MO and then the merchandise is shipped back. If that isn't smart enough, everything on the list is going up in price from 35% to 75%. We will be paying more for a jar of coffee than people pay on the street...Oh yeah - the state gets a percentage back for the "recreation fund."...

The Coalition for Prisoners' Rights Newsletter is published monthly by the Prison Project of Santa Fe, Inc., P.O. Box 1911, Santa Fe, NM 87504-1911. Subscription rates are: free to prisoners, their family members, and ex-prisoners who request it themselves; \$12/year for other individuals; \$25/year for government agencies and for-profit institutions. Please do not send us other people's names for our mailing list; we can no longer respond to these requests. We appreciate those who help us by sharing their newsletter and by sending stamps.

Mailing list additions and address changes should go into effect within two months from their post-marked date. We don't have the resources to acknowledge these requests by letter. Requests for referrals and other correspondence will be answered within four to six 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 mentioned.**

THE CRITIC

Lake City FL October 7, 1998

...I have been criticized many times by other prisoners saying: If you would stop filing on them, they will stop retaliating against you for it. You can't beat the system."...It raised my spirits very much when I read this quote by Theodore Roosevelt: "It is not the critic who counts, not the man who points out how the strong man stumbled or where the door of deeds could have done them better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred with dust and sweat and blood, and who, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly, so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who know neither victory nor defeat."

WHAT RULES TO FOLLOW?

Marysville OH October 10, 1998

.....How are we supposed to rehabilitate ourselves effectively when we don't know who or what rules to follow next?...These administrative rules are most often ignored with no logic...Can you tell me where is the justice?

VISITING HOURS

Santa Fe NM October 11, 1998

...Our families are forced to stand and wait outside the facility... for no other reason than to intentionally discourage visitors from visiting. Then finally when our visitors enter the visiting officers' station, they are greeted by an intimidating, disrespectful and extremely rude officer...

Numerous inmates of Spanish/Mexican descent and their families are being targeted and discriminated against by officers...Visitors are further humiliated by being told to submit to a type of drug testing machine that has proven to be inaccurate most of the time...If the person does submit to this method of inaccurate testing and tests positive...they are subjected to a dehumanizing, degrading and humiliating strip search...





VOICES FROM INSIDE continued

A, A WHAT BEGINS WITH A?

Florence AZ October 19, 1998

...I am a prisoner in Corrections Corporation of America in Florence AZ...We were shipped here illegally by Alaska because of overcrowded conditions in Alaska - which did exist. But where we were shipped to was supposed to be by bid - it wasn't. Inmates were supposed to meet certain criteria - ha! a joke. They needed to fill 250 beds...

As we are here absent inter-state compact, Arizona is saying that they have no jurisdiction over us. As we weren't sentenced by their court system and so were not under the Arizona DOC, they said there was nothing they could do about conditions here. Alaska has no legal powers outside their boundaries, so here we are under CCA's care...

Y2K AND THE YEAR 2000

Tennessee Colony TX October 19, 1998

The year 2000(Y2K) technology problem, also known as the millennium bug, or the Y2K computer problem is caused by a "short cut" used in many computers. Unfortunately, computers and microchips that still use 2 numbers to represent the year will, on January 1, 2000, recognize 00 not as 2000, but as 1900. The "experts" say this could make computer systems shut down or generate incorrect data.

For further information, questions should be directed to: Year 2000 Team, U.S. General Services Administration, Office of Governmentwide Policy, 1800 F St NW, Room 2014, Washington DC 20405.

PREPAID PHONE SERVICE

Draper UT October 20, 1998

I thought you might be interested in a company, Communication Systems 2000, Inc., that provides prepaid phone service for calls made from inmate phones in Utah. I've used them for a year and have saved hundreds of dollars in long distance charges...I can even call my brother, who has a block on his phone from receiving collect calls. And they provide international calls as well. This company services all jails and prisons in Utah. I suggest inmates in other states with high rates for collect long distance contact them. Communication Systems 2000, 10271South 1300 East, Suite 143, Sandy UT 84094, 1-801-733-7193.

VOICES IN SOLIDARITY



NOVEMBER: PUERTO RICAN HISTORY MONTH

On November 19, 1492, Tainos and Arawaks living in the land of Boriken (Puerto Rico's original, pre-invasion name) greeted a group of lost European "illegals," fresh off the boat. We denounce the legacies of these invaders and tell the true history of our continuing struggle and resistance. Comité 98, (510) 893-3181, ext. 126 or 1-800-438-8181 ext 126. <http://members.aol.com/baileme/comite98.htm>

2nd INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON DRUG WAR PRISONERS

John Beresford of the Committee on Unjust Sentencing has arranged for the 2nd International Conference On Drug War Prisoners. It will be held at York University in Toronto, Canada, March 20-21, 1999. They are looking for organizations to participate. Papers from the academic, activist and especially POW standpoint are sought. For more information, please contact: John Beresford, Committee On Unjust Sentencing, PO Box 76665, Los Angeles CA 90076, johnber@earthlink.net

"IN SEARCH OF SELF"

The Siddha Meditation Prison Project offers Siddha Yoga Meditation to incarcerated seekers. Siddha Yoga teaches that the individual and the divine are one, that the source of love, joy and creativity lies within each person. Through a simple process of focusing and quieting the mind, a meditator can have the direct experience of his or her own higher power or inner Self. The home study course reaches prisoners in 350 prisons in the U.S., England, France, Spain, Mexico, Canada and Australia. It is free of charge to all inmates, teaches how to begin and sustain a meditation practice, comes in monthly mailings of 2 lessons and is available in Spanish or English. Siddha Meditation Prison Project, 1132 Stanford Ave, Oakland CA 94608, (510) 428-1836.

SOUTHLAND PRISON NEWS

Cooperative News Service: A regional network of prisoners and supporters has started **SOUTHLAND PRISON NEWS**, a monthly newsclipping service concerned with the barbaric conditions prevailing in prisons across the South. The publication is offered free to anyone who regularly sends in clips from their area; otherwise, \$30/year. Contact: Lee Bailey, FA PenPals, PO Box 9691, Richmond VA 23228-9691.

Crime of the Month

If you still doubt that responsible media executives are an extinct species, take a look at Rupert Murdoch's most recent actions. Murdoch, billionaire owner of Fox TV and several publishing businesses, has derailed a TV documentary because he didn't want to upset his friend, Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas.

Murdoch stopped the production of a TV version of the investigative book, Strange Justice, a prize winning report about the sexual harassment charges against Thomas. The book concludes that Anita Hill told the truth about Thomas's harassment.

Murdoch also recently ordered HarperCollins to halt publication of a book by Christopher Patten,

aka Crimetoppers

the last British governor of Hong Kong. The book, now published elsewhere, describes China's record of human rights abuses.

If the publication annoyed Beijing, Murdoch's profitable satellite TV service in China, Star-TV, could be threatened. Earlier to protect Star-TV from Chinese government interference, Murdoch ordered Star-TV to stop running BBC news. The BBC had aired reports on Chinese dissidents that upset Beijing.

Since other countries, including the U.S., abuse human rights and cover it up, China's reaction is understandable--but not Murdoch's insatiable greed.

This is our Crime of the Month.



Coalition for Prisoners' Rights/
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Santa Fe, New Mexico 87504-1911

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11/98

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