

Coalition For Prisoners' Rights Newsletter

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THE END OF THE MILLENNIUM: THE BOTTOM OF THE BARREL

In the soap opera of current events, there are some very clear messages. As we lavishly continue to punish the poor and reward the rich, we create more and more examples of extreme wrongdoing by those in power. Even mainstream media and privileged power brokers are forced to tell on each other to beat out the story coming from someone else a little further out of the system.

One good example of this recently is soft porn king Larry Flynt actually undertaking an investigation that has already led to the resignation of the shoo-in candidate for the Speaker of the federal House of Representatives. That would have been considered too bizarre to be believable back when many of us were taking 7th grade civics.

The concentration of power among the few, fewer, fewest, rich, richer richest in the last 20+ years as prison populations have skyrocketed, has occurred in a number of different ways. Sometimes laws are changed by legislatures--like tax relief for the rich (for both individuals and corporations) leading to even more concentration of wealth. Many times so-called separate branches of government work together to achieve a more harmful result in a shorter period of time than either one could have done alone. An example of this is the Antiterrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act (surely the ridiculousness of the name says it all)--which was enacted by congress in 1996 at the urging of the president.

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THE END cont.

According to 9th federal district court judge Stephen Reinhardt, in that Act, "no one bothered to explain how limiting the historic right of all state prisoners to habeas relief would help the federal government in the latest of its periodic 'wars' There was an election on the horizon...President Clinton had yet to show the first glimmer of interest in curbing prosecutorial excesses that might infringe the rights of persons high or low....Up to that point, President Clinton had not shown any interest in protecting the constitutional rights of any individual accused of wrongdoing...."

There are countless additional examples of abuses of power. Two recent ones include the 1997 New Jersey State Trooper of the Year being indicted for taking bribes from motorists and the person in charge of the San Francisco police DNA testing lab changing his answers on 3 tests required to verify his skills in analyzing DNA samples.

The behavior of the powerful has become so blatant that the Pittsburgh Post Gazette newspaper undertook a 2 year investigation. The 10-part series was published in December 1998. The detailed series recounted lies, cover-ups and pay-offs by federal agents and prosecutors--those same figures who are the hard-working heroes of countless TV series.

The hiding of evidence, distorting of facts, paying for perjury and setting up of innocent people in order to get indictments, guilty pleas and convictions resulted in a process where "fairness be damned...whatever works is what is right" according to a former Florida federal prosecutor. The federal sentencing guidelines say a person who pleads guilty and "cooperates" should receive a lesser sentence than someone who pleads innocent and is convicted. This makes courts a "rubber stamp" of prosecutors, according to a former New York state prosecutor.

The above facts have helped lead us to our end-of-the-millennium resolution: Speak Truth to Power.



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MORATORIUM 2000

In anticipation of the new millennium, Sister Helen Prejean and other notable U.S. abolitionists have formed an organization called Moratorium 2000 and issued a worldwide call to suspend use of the death penalty next year.

In a letter to anti-death penalty activists and organizations, Sister Helen said the group's mission is to reach out, "to friend and foe alike to convince them to join us in our efforts to obtain and ensure the full protection of human rights for all as guaranteed by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights."

In the fall of 1999, Moratorium 2000 plans to rally at the United Nations in New York City and to present the world body with a truckload of national and international petitions and letters supporting an international moratorium on executions. According to Sister Helen, the organization hopes to use the event to obtain passage of a U.N. resolution calling for a worldwide moratorium.

Sister Helen, who wrote the anti-death penalty book, Dead Man Walking, is Moratorium 2000's honorary chair. It's chair is Michael Radelet, a professor at the University of Florida and co-author of In Spite of Innocence, a case study of hundreds of cases of innocent men and women convicted

of capital crimes in the U.S. Vice chair is Richard C. Dieter, director of the Washington, D.C.-based Death Penalty Information Center, which studies and reports on capital punishment in the U.S.

Magdaleno M. Rose-Avila, a longtime activist for economic, social, and criminal justice who once headed up Amnesty International's U.S. efforts to abolish the death penalty, serves as Moratorium 2000's executive director.

The group's mailing address is 8306 Mills Drive, #607, Miami, Florida 33183; its email address is mavila@gte.net; its phone number is 305 596-7293. Those persons wanting to participate in the petition campaign should contact Moratorium 2000.

Sister Helen points out that the U.S. remains one of the foremost practitioners of state-sanctioned murder. "Currently, the United States stands isolated with a few countries such as Iran, Iraq, Nigeria, and China that refuse to respect human rights and continue to execute their citizens," she said. She noted that the American Bar Association recently took the step of calling for a moratorium on all executions in the U.S.

Moratorium 2000 is a non-partisan, non-denominational effort to ensure the protection of human rights for all.

VOICES FROM INSIDE



CONTAMINATION

Angola LA July 17, 1998 Memo from the Warden:

On July 10, 1998, the LSP water supply was in violation of the maximum contaminant level of fecal coliform bacteria as set forth in the State and Federal Primary Drinking Water regulations. Action has been taken to eliminate the contamination. The follow-up samples taken on July 14, 1998 and July 15, 1998 indicate no presence of coliform bacteria...

The LSP water supply is routinely tested on a monthly basis. Upon receipt of notice by the Health Department of contaminated water samples, LSP took immediate action to eliminate the contamination. Subsequent samples were taken and tested by the state lab as well as a private independent lab. All such samples were free from contamination...

ASBESTOS

Petersburg VA September 30, 1998

In late August of this year I was moved...to the federal penitentiary in Lewisburg PA...(which is)virtually loaded with asbestos...Open, passive air vents in every individual cell contain loose cloth-covered asbestos that is all the more dangerous in that the cloth wrapping and asbestos are almost completely deteriorated and exposed. Worse, maintenance inmates, maintenance staff and prison staff have routine and daily access to these passive air vents through wall panels outside each cell (which are used quite frequently to change lights and to fix plumbing). Both staff and inmates who I have seen working in these air vents do so completely unprotected....

The question to ask of Lewisburg is how many persons have died of long-term exposure to asbestos and how many other persons are going to die or suffer serious illness in that this exposure continues to this very day?

MARTIN GURULE: FREE AT LAST.

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.**

KIDNAPPED

Tamms IL December 4, 1998

...Tamms is a \$90 million, 500 bed facility which employees a full-time staff, yet sits less than half-full today, a year after its opening. Tamms is currently housing many non-violent, short-time, mentally impaired and even protective custody inmates, while operating under the guise of public safety and justice. The majority of these inmates were kidnapped from general population in the middle of the night from various maximum, medium and minimum security facilities and brought here for no legitimate reason and placed under Administrative Detention status.

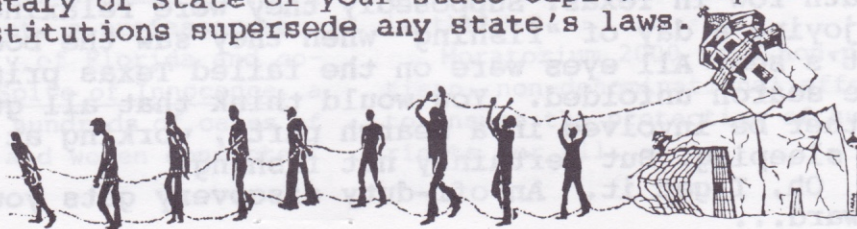
For those of us here the conditions of confinement are dehumanizing, degenerative and psychologically toxic...

VOTING

Concord NH December 5, 1998

...We incarcerated inmates have won the constitutional right to vote. This is a major victory for us here in New Hampshire, a state with truth-in-sentencing laws...This court ruling has already upset several politicians, especially those in the small towns housing prisoners...Berlin will have 1,000 voters...Since the total voting population in Berlin is only a couple thousand voters, the way inmates vote as a block will decide election results..

Both the Attorney General and the Governor have appealed to the Supreme Court. Still, there are legislators who have sided with us...I suggest to those brothers who are interested in their voting rights to get copies of their individual states' constitutions...Copies are free by writing to the Secretary of State of your state capital city. The states' constitutions supersede any state's laws.





**VOICES
FROM
INSIDE
continued**

HATRED

Carson City MI December 7, 1998

...Not until recently upon coming to prison were my eyes so completely opened to just how horribly HOT the heat from hatred really is...It appears that not only with fellow inmates, but with corrections officers as well, "sissies and punks" alike are totally acceptable, but to merely be a gay male is not...The one thing sadder than Matthew Shepard's death is the fact that with what I've experienced already within the prison system and the attitudes that are shared by so many, these killers may very well be hailed as heroes ..

It is up to all of us to stop the hate, to do whatever we each can to understand each other and then to share and educate...The next time you see hatred in action, or you hear someone unfairly refer to any person based on any form of prejudice, check your mental pockets, because your indifference to those situations may very well be the match which starts a fire of hatred somewhere, someday!

SCROOGE RETREATS

Mt. Meigs AL December 9, 1998

...After many, many phone calls to the commissioners of the DOC, we now have our Christmas package items reinstated. Much to the displeasure of prison officials who feel that such not only is a burden, but who also feel that inmates are undeserving of anything whatsoever!

. This just goes to show that with the power of the pen and the power of the phone, good can be accomplished.

FISHING

Crescent City CA December 11, 1998

Does anybody find it rather peculiar that 2 "off duty" prison guards found the body of the prisoner who escaped from death row in Texas? Supposedly they were relaxing and enjoying a day of "fishing" when they saw the body float by. Let's see: All eyes were on the failed Texas prison system as the search unfolded. You would think that all guards would either be involved in a search party, working at the prison or sleeping. But certainly not fishing!

Oh, I get it. An off-duty discovery gets you the \$5,000 reward...

PURSUE AND ORGANIZE

Parchman MS December 14, 1998

We have had as a whole been suffering from police brutality, arbitrary action by prison officials in violation of our constitutional rights, along with illegal classifications and conditions here at the Mississippi DOC. There is a serious need to promote social justice, human rights and the rights of prisoners through legal, civil, moral and corporate means with support from our family and friends so that we may pursue and organize a prison labor union here in Mississippi...We welcome information to help us in this endeavor. 125 signatures.

Victor Hurns, 09848, Unit 32/E, Parchman MS 388738

NETWORK LINK-UP

Columbia SC December 19, 1998

...The New African Islamic Forces and some progressive political prisoners have...begun to bombard legislators on the newly elected governor's transition team with letters to hopefully influence those who can change the condition of the prison masses in this state and elect a better or humane commissioner. Local progressive state congressional black caucus members and African American newspapers have been most sympathetic and receptive too...

TRIPPED

Dallas TX December 21, 1998

...Once in jail as a minority, we do not get treated right according to the constitution. The state appoints us an attorney who seems to work with the state attorney to get us to cop for probation or imprisonment. Holding us in jail for a long period causes us to lose our jobs and homes. Bills stack up. Then they release us after we have lost everything; they expect us to pay fees. If we cannot, then they put us back in jail with a bond or bail too high for us to afford. They send us right back down the same road with more time in jail. The poor are feeding grounds for the rich. When a rich man stumbles, he is supported by the law. When a poor man trips, he is pushed down by the justice system

51 signatures.

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Crime of the Month

aka Crimetoppers

As the United Nations celebrated the 50th anniversary of the Declaration of Human Rights on December 10th it also lamented its failures.

Secretary-General Kofi Annan called for a renewal of the declaration's promises and other speakers noted that despite the ratification of the 60 treaties inspired by the declaration, hundreds of millions worldwide are denied political, social and economic rights. They cited the lack of health care and education for women and girls in Afghanistan; mass killings in Rwanda and the former Yugoslavia; and the murders and disappearances of thousands under former Chilean dictator Augusto Pinochet.

They also noted that 20 percent of the world's population consumes 80 percent of its resources while over 1 billion people live without adequate food, shelter, water or education, adding that the declaration was meant to guarantee freedom from fear and freedom from want.

Proudly, the U.S. announced new measures to advocate human rights abroad, but made no reference to its failure to ratify the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Culture Rights or those treaties to benefit women and children.

This failure, symptomatic of the numerous human rights abuses in the U.S., is our Crime of the Month.



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