

Coalition For Prisoners' Rights Newsletter

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April 1999

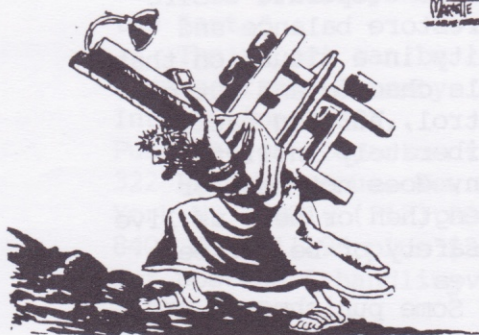
THE WORST of the DEATH PENALTY

"I see no other defensible position than to strive for pain-reduction....If in doubt, do not pain. Look for alternatives to punishments....Social systems ought to be constructed in ways that reduce to a minimum the perceived need for infliction of pain for the purpose of social control. Sorrow is inevitable, but not hell created by human beings." - Nils Christie

The death penalty is for punishment. Punishment is the deliberate infliction of pain by people representing those in power in the name of a greater good. Punishment and justice are not the same things. There is little evidence that

punishment produces lasting positive change.

It is much more likely to be life destroying and life distorting rather than life enhancing. It is perfectly true that a small portion of those in prison have done terrible things to others. What is tragic is that those things cannot be undone. What we can do is work to keep such things from happening again and to



(continued on next page)

WORST , cont.

heal those who have already been hurt. In order to do that, we must help those who have done the harm.

We must also remember that the overwhelming number of people in prison and on death row are there because of racism and poverty - they are there for who they are, not for what they have done. Most people in prison haven't harmed anyone.

Excessively long prison sentences only hurt - they help people become more angry and less functional. Killing people who have been convicted of killing people - and who, of course, may be innocent and are certainly poor and disproportionately people of color - only perpetuates the cycle of violence and vengeance.

Although the beliefs and feelings that lead to executions come from pain and the desperate desire to restore balance and sanity in a situation that feels chaotic and out of control, hurting back, deliberately inflicting pain, does not heal or strengthen or help us live in safety or be our best selves.

Some punishments are worse than other because

they are more damaging and irrevocable than others. Those that completely take over and control a person's entire life are the worst of all. These punishments include both outright killing and the sentence of "life without the possibility of parole," which is rightly named "death by imprisonment" by Bob Gross. Just as there were caring people in the last century who refused to join the efforts of the Society for the Improvement of Infant Chimney Sweeps because they opposed having infants as chimney sweeps altogether, so too today, we stand with CURE and we demand the abolition of the death sentence, including "life without."

"Using punishment to deter individuals from causing further harm assumes rational thinking. It is flawed psychology. But punishing one in order to deter others is a scapegoating process. Societies then extend scapegoating from individuals to groups who become expendable people. In the U.S. correctional system, scapegoating applies to the poor and people of color Punishment looks backward, not to bring benefit..." - Virginia Mackey

Resources

RELIGIOUS ORGANIZING AGAINST
THE DEATH PENALTY PROJECT
c/o AMERICAN FRIENDS SERVICE
COMMITTEE

Newsletter: The Vision
1501 Cherry St, Philadelphia
PA 19102, (215) 241-7127

peaceCENTER
PO Box 36, San Antonio TX
78291, (210) 224-4673

PRISONER SUBSCRIBERS: LAST CALL

Return the whole
renewal form by May 1 to
continue the Coalition
Newsletter. If you did not
get a renewal form, send
us your last name, first
name & initial, ID number,
complete current address,
WRITTEN CLEARLY.

**MANY THANKS TO ALL THOSE
WHO HAVE ALREADY SENT IN
THEIR RENEWAL FORMS, AND
STAMPS AND MONEY - THEY
REALLY HELP US KEEP GOING.**

TOO TRUE

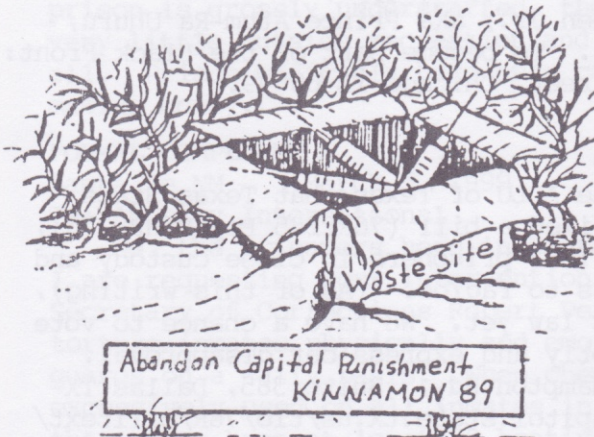
Everyone female knows
when they think about it
that women in prison must
be victims of violent
abuse. The only good news
is that this horrendous
state of affairs is now
getting some public
notice.

Amnesty International
released a report in early
March that even USA Today
reported on. It is titled "Not
part of my sentence"
Violations of
the Human Rights of Women
in Custody.

The report states that
women in U.S. prisons
undergo a "shocking array"
of abuses, including rape
by guards and male
prisoners.

A former federal
prisoner in California
comments accurately: "I've
always said I'm not the
first woman who's been
subjected to this cruelty,
and I'll probably not be
the last."

The report can be
ordered from: Amnesty
International USA,
Publications Department,
322 Eighth Avenue, New
York NY 10001, (212) 807-
8400 for \$11.95 plus \$3.50
for postage & handling.





VOICES FROM INSIDE

CLASS ACTION FOR HEBREW ISRAELITES

State Farm VA February 16, 1999

Members of the African Hebrew Israelites of Jerusalem, whose Spiritual Leader is Ben Ammi Be Israel, are in the beginning stages of filing a class action against the Virginia Department of Corrections (VDOC) to establish: a vegan diet for all Israelites in the VDOC who are practicing the faith, to permit all practicing Israelites to be allowed to observe the Sabbath day, which is from sunset Friday until sunset Saturday, and to establish a Hebrew Israelite service at all VDOC institutions, so the teachings of Israelites can be afforded to the inmate populations throughout the VDOC. Any Israelites interested in joining this class action, please forward your name, state number and institutional location to Thomas C. Henderson, 177489, aka Yoseph Ben Israel at Powhatan Correctional Center, State Farm VA 23160. Sholom.

TRIBE OF UMOJA

Waupun WI February 20, 1999

The Tribe of Umoja is looking for sisters and brothers in the rest of this country to become a part of the United Black Front, and open new chapters of the Tribe of Umoja in other states. The Tribe is a spiritual, political and cultural organization embracing all religious faiths that Blacks have helped evolve from KMT (Egypt) to Islam.

For a new chapter: Norman C. Green Jr., aka Prince Atum-Ra Uhuru, 228971, PO Box 351, Waupun WI 53963. To become part of the Black Front: United Black Front, 2302 E. 71st Street, Chicago IL 60649.

RADIO ACCESS

Huntsville TX February 24, 1999

We were recently informed by the ACLU of Texas that Texas State Senator Royce West (D-Dallas) has filed a bill (76R2285 Pep-D HB 275), the intent of which is to deny all TDCJ prisoners in close custody and in administrative segregation access to radios. (As of this writing), the bill has been filed, but is not law yet. We have a chance to vote down this bill if we mobilize promptly and express our disapproval.

Contact Royce West at: 5787 S. Hampton Rd., Suite 385, Dallas TX 75232, (214) 467-0123, <http://www.capitol.state.tx.us/tlo/76R/billtext/HB002751.HIM>

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.**

GATHER TOGETHER

Tallahassee FL February 25, 1999

LSD prisoners UNITE!!!! We are currently working on a proposal to re-schedule LSD, which would in turn lower the penalties. If you or someone you know is incarcerated for LSD, please contact: AMNESTY, PO Box 76665, Los Angeles CA 90076.

PRO-

Appleton MN March 1, 1999

Four months ago we were transferred from the Halaw Hight Security Facility in Aiea HI where inmate beatings and killing at the hands of "correctional officers" were an everyday part of life.

Here at the Prairie Correctional Facility, owned and operated by CCA, we inmates are treated with the utmost respect. We have access to numerous educational programs, life skills and drug rehab. We are allowed our own TVs, cassettes, coffee pots, guitars, keyboards....

CON -

Lawrenceville VA March 1, 1999

Here in Virginia, there is one private prison, in Lawrenceville VA. It is a 1,500 man medium security facility which is owned and operated by Corrections Corporation of America (CCA). This privately owned prison is grossly understaffed, the officers are under trained, there is very little outside recreation and few programs, and no law library at all. Prison officials here only care about one thing, and that's making money....

FORMAL COMPLAINT

Santa Fe NM March 5, 1999

To: Amnesty International

We, the prisoners here in Santa Fe NM, U.S.A., North Facility, Unit I are requesting your intervention. NM Governor Gary Johnson and Secretary of Corrections Robert Perry have issued unwritten orders to torture inmates physically and emotionally. We are being assaulted by guards on a daily basis. When chemical agents are used, they are excessively used on all inmates in the housing unit. This month alone there have been at least 20 beatings by guards. (continued on next page)



VOICES FROM INSIDE continued

(Formal Complaint, cont.)

On February 23, 1999, at approximately midnight, prison staff known as the "goon squad" entered Unit I and sprayed \$517.45 worth of pepper spray on us. This is an excessive amount of chemical agent. The inmates that were asleep woke up choking and coughing. The chemical agents flowed from cell to cell through the venilation system. We were not given medical treatment for the excessive amounts of chemical agents we were forced to inhale.

(Much of) the New Mexico prison population is infected with the hepatitis B virus...

EID UL FIT'R AND EID UL ADHA

Memphis TN March 7, 1999

The Eid ul Fit'r and the Eid ul Adha are two holidays for all muslims who are incarcerated in federal and state prisons. These are religious feasts, elaborate meals of celebration. The Eid ul Fit'r (Ramadan Achievement) is the first part and the second part is the Eid ul Adha (Sacrifice of Abraham)...Yet the Bureau of Prisons only allows one ceremonial meal for muslims, while other religious groups are allowed several ceremonial meals. At F.C.I. Memphis it had been agreed to include dishes prepared by outside volunteers.

SEEDS OF RELIGION

Ina IL March 9, 1999

The seeds of Native American religion are finally springing to life within the Illinois DOC. Please be a part of this new life if you practice Native American ways, particularly the way of the pipe. Please spread the word to any and all prisoners who are called this way...Several medicine men are being screened as Native American spiritual advisors, able to conduct pipe ceremonies and related activities, and should soon be made accessible to those who practice Native American religious ways...Become involved by making a written request to your prison chaplain specifying your desire to practice Native American religion and to meet with the medicine man. If necessary, follow up by using the grievance and religious request procedures outlined in the rulebooks...A large Chicago law firm is handling the case, Ellis v. Illinois, 96C-9268 NO Ill or write Shawn Michael Ellis, 6820-A N. 35th Ave, Phoenix AZ 85017.



VOICES IN SOLIDARITY

FAMILY SUPPORT GROUP

The families of inmates who have been delayed or denied medical care until they are crippled, terminally ill or dead, are forming a support group. We wish to contact all inmates and families who have either been delayed or denied medical care for serious needs. This would also include inmates who have been transferred when they attempted to use the BOP Administrative Remedy Program to get care. Richard M. Cauble, FAIMS, PO Box 2744-199, Huntington Beach CA 92647.

FLORIDA PRISON ACTION NETWORK

The Florida Prison Action Network held its 2nd annual demonstration project at the Capitol Rotunda in Tallahassee in March - its most important annual event. Its purpose is to educate the public and Florida's lawmakers.

The Florida Prison Action Network, 1110-C NW 8th Avenue, Gainesville FL 32601, includes: Florida Prison Legal Perspectives, Inc., Families with Loved Ones in Prison, Inc., FAIR - prevent and report sexual violence in prisons and jails, Parents with a Cause, TRIPP: The Real Illumination on the Prison Population and Citizens for Alternatives Punishment. We have joined together to comfort and support each other.

MILLIONS FOR MUMIA

Mumia is all of us. March and Rally, April 24 - major locations: Philadelphia and San Francisco. For more information: Millions for Mumia, c/o National Peoples Campaign, 2489 Mission St. #28, San Francisco CA 94110, (415) 821-6545, www.peoplescampaign.org

TAHIRIH JUSTICE CENTER

The Center seeks to bring justice to the lives of women facing human rights abuses, with a particular emphasis on immigrant and refugee women. The Center takes a holistic approach to serving its clients by offering a range of legal, medical, and social services. We specialize in gender-based asylum claims. Tahirih Justice Center, 108 North Virginia Avenue Suite 100, Falls Church VA 22046, (703) 237-4554.

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 names of other people; order only for yourself. We appreciate those who help us by sharing their newsletter and by sending stamps.

Crime of the Month

When Tamoxifen, touted as a breast cancer prevention drug, hit the media last April, the drama of the moment was enhanced when the National Cancer Institute halted the trials of the drug, "so that all women in the trial (meaning those in the placebo group) could be given the chance to use Tamoxifen."

But wait. The drug has been tested on 13,000 healthy women over the age of 35 defined as at high risk for breast cancer based on the assumption that age, heredity, and other unalterable facts are the only measurable cancer risk factors.

News reports indicated that the drug carried a slight risk of fatal blood clots and uterine cancer, but examination of the trial

aka Crimetoppers

results indicated that these risks in fact were a 150% jump in uterine cancer cases, a three-fold increase in blood clots in the lungs and 60% rise in clots in major veins. Three women taking Tamoxifen died from lung blood clots.

Based on raw numbers the reports claimed a 49% reduction in breast cancer risk, but in absolute terms the reduction amounts to 1%. Additional studies in Italy and Britain showed no reduction in cancer risk.

Even the FDA refused to approve the drug for cancer prevention, but the manufacturer can still advertise it for short-term reduction of risk.

It seems that some drug pushers get all the breaks. That is our Crime of the Month.



Coalition for Prisoners' Rights/
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4/99

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