

# Coalition For Prisoners' Rights Newsletter

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June 1999

## CONTROL UNITS AND TORTURE DEVICES

These past years have been full of hundreds and hundreds of reports of an increasingly disturbing nature from prisoners and their families throughout the U.S., including cold, filth, callous medical care, extended isolation sometimes lasting over a decade, use of devices of torture, harassment and brutality.

These are carried out by means of four point restraints, restraint hoods, restraint belts, stun grenades, stun guns, stun belts, tethers, waist and leg chains and something called an air taser. The self-reports of the deteriorating mental health of those kept in extended isolation are also very disturbing. The use of extended isolation has been a growing concern. The reports about the use of devices of torture have largely been from isola-

tion units where there are few witnesses.

The monitoring that the National Campaign to Stop Control Unit Prisons has done indicates that approximately 10 percent of the U.S. prison population lives in extended enforced isolation. Prisoners must remain constantly on the alert for their own mental and physical deterioration.

Jailhouse lawyers, Islamic militants and prisoner activists are placed in extended isolation. Another population filling the isolation cells is youth of color imprisoned as a result of the racist crack-cocaine laws.

Current efforts to expand the solitary confinement population involve the alleged spread of gang problems in U.S. prisons. Gangs exist in prisons; we know this problem is sometimes created and

(continued on next page)



# CONTROL UNITS cont.

often enhanced by prison authorities. The DOC is using various counter-intelligence tactics to create gang problems. Rumors are started by guards provoking one group against another. This trend is being repeated throughout the country, increasing the pressure to build supermax prisons.

The nation-wide move to expand the use of isolation is fostered by the guard unions. These unions are now contributing heavily to the political campaigns of "law and order" candidates. Guards reportedly feel that these type of units provide a safe working environment. Isolation units also provide them with a place in which to engage in unwitnessed torture.

While specific conditions in isolation prisons vary, the goal of these units is clearly to disable prisoners through physical, psychological or spiritual breakdown.

Couple all this with sexual abuse, the use of prison labor, people dying under privatized medical care and the shocking treatment of people being held in INS detention centers and you have an excellent picture of the real penal system in the U.S. today.

The politics of the police, the politics of the courts, the politics of the prison system and the politics of the death penalty are a manifestation of the racism and classism which govern so much of the lives of all of us.

Add to this mix the death penalty, the physical abuse of women in prisons, abuse of the mentally ill, abuse involving prison labor, involuntary human scientific experimentation, violation of children's rights and the picture of the incarceration system in the U.S. becomes more complete. All of those practices go on daily and they fly in the face of the International Treaties and Conventions to which the U.S. is a signatory.

There is no way to look into any aspect of the prison system in the U.S. without being slapped in the face with the racism and white supremacy that prisoners of color endure.

If we dig deeper into U.S. practices, the political function they serve is inescapable. Police, the courts, the prison system and the death penalty all serve as social control mechanisms. How they function also fits the United Nations definition of genocide. The economic function they serve is a form of neo-slavery.



## RESOURCES

**Bonnie Kerness**  
**National Campaign to Stop Control**  
**Unit Prisons/AFSC**  
**972 Broad St., 6th Floor**  
**Newark NJ 07102**  
**(973) 643-3079**

A  
Call Book



RESOURCES, cont.

**Prison Focus**

(conditions in Pelican Bay, Corcoran and Valley State Prison for Women, medical abuse and neglect of prisoners with HIV/AIDS)  
2940 16th St., Room 100  
San Francisco, CA 94103  
(415)252-9211

from --

*No One Can Stop the Rain*

-- Assata Shakur

Watch, the grass is growing...  
In any prison yard, you can see  
it growing.

In the cracks, in the crevices,  
between the steel and the  
Concrete, out of the dead gray  
dust, the bravest blades  
Of grass shoot up, bold and  
full of life.

Watch, the grass is growing.  
It is growing through the  
cracks.

The guards say that the grass  
is against the Law.  
Grass is contraband in prison.  
The guards say that the grass  
is insolent.

It is uppity grass, radical  
grass, militant grass.

They call it weeds...

The guards try to mow it down,  
but it keeps on growing.

The grass grows into a poem.  
The grass grows into a song...  
And the Song is freedom.

Watch, the grass is growing.

## ANTI-DEATH PENALTY MOMENTUM BUILDS

Among the anti-death penalty victories in recent months, and as of this writing still subject to the pro-death penalty governor's veto, is Nebraska's. Its one-house, 49 member state legislature has voted 27 to 21 for a two year moratorium on executions. (Thirty votes are needed to override a veto.) There are 10 men currently on Nebraska's death row.

There is also the non-binding resolution passed by the Illinois House of Representatives calling for a 6 month moratorium on executions. Eleven Illinois death row prisoners have had their convictions and sentences overturned since 1976, a number as the result of prosecutorial misconduct.

Massachusetts and Michigan, non-death penalty states, defeated bills aimed at reinstating executions this spring. In New Mexico, the Coalition to Repeal the Death Penalty gathered 14 legislative co-sponsors for an anti-death penalty bill with LWOP that was defeated in a NM House of Representative's committee by only 1 vote. A death penalty abolition campaign has begun in Kentucky. Kentucky currently has LWOP.

These victories energize the Moratorium 2000 Campaign (8306 Mills Dr. #607, Miami FL 33183; (305)596-7293). We salute the people whose long, hard work has resulted in this progress.



# VOICES FROM INSIDE



**FROM: THE LAW OFFICE OF DONNA BRORBY, April 8, 1999**

We represent the class of all Texas state prisoners in the remaining parts of the Ruiz lawsuit. **We are not able to represent individual prisoners, give legal advice, or help to fix an individual's problems...**

Judge Justice has just written his decision after a hearing in January and February. He decided that the protections in the **Final Judgment** will stay in place; that is, the state lost when it asked to have total control over how it runs its prisons. The judge also decided that some areas of prison life are so outrageous that they violate the U.S. Constitution, and prison officials must prove how they will improve things. The judge agreed that medical and psychiatric care in TDCJ also are often inhumane, inadequate and disturbing, but (that)...he could not order the prison system to improve treatment...We are considering whether there is any other legal action we can take.

We have been ordered, along with TDCJ, to come up with a plan to improve how Ad Seg is run...and to provide real safety for (prisoners).

## **INFORMATION NEEDED**

Lake Butler FL February 15, 1999

The FL DOC has a new Secretary, a Mike Moore. Before coming to Florida, Moore served as South Carolina's Director of Corrections and Texas'. I am seeking information of programs and changes Moore introduced in his former positions...Charles Lambert, 079341, PO Box 678, C2-1415, Lake Butler FL 32054.

## **DRUG WAR**

Ft. Worth TX March 30, 1999

...There is a group of concerned citizens who are working overtime to change these insane drug laws - contact them at: The November Coalition, 795 S Cedar, Colville WA 99114, (509) 684-1550. Their publication is called "The Razor Wire" -it's free to prisoners, an awesome newsletter!

## **ELECTRONIC LEARNING AND STORAGE**

Iowa Park TX April 1999

I have been working on getting a laptop styled computer and accessories to virtually eliminate excessive paper storage for over 5 years. Now I have found a company willing to produce a product that is prison usable. Also seeking assistance from groups and individuals in efforts to help implement policies, conditions and use in these prison



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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.**

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systems: federal, Texas, California, Minnesota, Oklahoma, New Mexico and West Virginia. Write: John W. Harris III, 679006, 2101 FM 369 N., Iowa Park, TX 76367-6568.

#### SABBATH OBSERVANCE

Draper UT May 1, 1999

Members of the Jewish and/or like religions are in the beginning stages of filing a class action against the Utah DOC to establish a kosher diet for all practicing Jews and to permit these prisoners to observe the Sabbath day, which is from sunset Friday to sunset Saturday. Anyone interested in joining the class action, send your name, prison number, housing assignment and any and all other information to: Prison Watch c/o D. John Musselman, Attorney, 96 East First South, Provo UT 84606.

#### MINIMAL NECESSITIES

Gatesville TX May 4, 1999

The administrative segregation units of the Texas prison system deprive prisoners of the minimal necessities of civilized life. Texas administrative segregation units violate those rights through extreme deprivation which cause profound and obvious psychological pain and suffering. Texas administrative segregation units are virtual incubators of psychosis -- seeding illness in otherwise healthy prisoners and exacerbating illness in those already suffering from mental infirmities. In furtherance, TDCJ-ID is violating the Eighth Amendment rights of prisoners in ad-seg by depriving them of life's minimal necessities. In conclusion, such deprivation represents the ultimate degradation of prisoners' dignity. The intentional deprivation of seemingly insignificant property can have profound psychological effects...







## VOICES FROM INSIDE continued

### WARM BODIES

Attica NY May 6, 1999

...Another type of racial discrimination is the discriminatory policies that are designated to target minorities. These policies deprive minorities of meaningful programs and benefits that would allow minorities to lead a law-abiding life within their communities.

The purpose of depriving these minorities of these needed programs and benefits is to steer them into a life of crime and use them as a tool to violate the civil rights and liberties of the tax paying citizens in the surrounding communities so that their proposed tougher laws, mandatory minimums and longer prison sentences can be more casually accepted along with the crackdown on street crime which is exclusively in poor minority communities...

### NEW AFRIKAN VOICE IN THE WILDERNESS

Columbia SC May 12, 1999

"New Afrikan Voice in the Wilderness" is a new, up and coming newsletter solely for the purpose of giving New Afrikan prisoners the opportunity to express their feelings, to come together and contribute to the revitalization of our communities.

Our goal is to allow prisoners to write and publish an abundance of information, from prison experiences to cultural, health issues, poetry, business ideas, economic empowerment, political issues, education matters, spiritual views, and more. Write: Dhoruba Sankofa Lumumba, 134540, Kirkland Supermax Unit, 4344 Broad River Road, Columbia SC 29210-4010.

### ELECTRONIC PHONE SYSTEMS

Hardwick GA May 13, 1999

I am incarcerated in the Georgia State Prison and forced to use the Harris Electronic Phone System in order to make calls. The cost of most calls ranges from \$6 to \$8 for 10 minutes...

For a civil suit, please give me any information on other state systems. Write: Billy Radford, EF236183, H-B Scott SP, PO Box 417, Hardwick GA 31034.





## VOICES IN SOLIDARITY

### **THE BUDDHIST LIBRARY**

**THE BUDDHIST LIBRARY** is a non-profit service organization which distributes books, catalog magazines and other material on Buddhist teachings and training. The Buddhist Library, PO Box 20101, Fredericton NB, CANADA E3B 6Y8 (postage: 46¢ for the 1st ½ oz.)

### **CELLMARK GREETING CARDS FOR PRISONERS**

From single cards, with message or blank inside, at \$1 to packages of 8 at \$6, shipping included. Biddle Publishing Co, PMB 103, 13 Gurnet Rd, Brunswick ME 04011, (207) 833-5016.

### **FAMM/ PAC-UP**

**Citizens to Reform Measure 11** has officially filed the initiative to repeal Measure 11. 65,422 valid signatures have to be turned in by July 2000 to make the ballot. Newsletter: "**The Justice Keeper.**" PO Box 301236, Portland OR 97294, (503) 491-0611.

### **BREAKING SILENCE: VOICES OF MOTHERS IN PRISON**

**BREAKING SILENCE** is the first national anthology of writings by mothers in prison. This anthology seeks to educate the public about the significant justice issues surrounding the lives of women in prison by providing a vehicle for their voices to be heard. JUSTICEWORKS COMMUNITY, 1012 Eighth Avenue, Brooklyn NY 11215-4312, (718) 499-6704.

### **NATIONAL PRISON HOSPICE ASSOCIATION**

Its mission is to promote hospice care for terminally ill prisoners those facing the prospect of dying in prison and their families. Newsletter: **NPHA News.** National Prison Hospice Association, PO Box 3769, Boulder CO 80307, (303) 544-1485.

### **OUMIMATES**

**OUMIMATES** is a mutual support and information group for friends and families of prisoners. Sponsored by the AFSC-AZ, it meets twice a month at Quaker House, 931 N 5th Ave, Tucson AZ 85707, (520) 623-9141.

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

aka Crimetoppers

How many people have to die or become seriously ill before the Food and Drug Administration withdraws a dangerous drug from the market? Quite a few. For example, Parke-Davis's diabetes drug, Rezulin, was approved in December of 1996 and, after an estimated 400 cases of liver failure by those taking the drug, the FDA's advisory committee reviewed it this March. The committee advised that approval of the drug be revoked, but the FDA's decision is still out. The United Kingdom withdrew this drug in December 1997.

The FDA was once considered the safety watchdog of the world and is

well-known for recognizing the dangers of Thalidomide and the Dalkon Shield. But beginning in 1994, alarms were sounded accusing the FDA of holding up approval for life saving drugs by research groups such as the Cato Institute, Heritage Foundation, and the Hudson Institute. They mounted a campaign to persuade Congress that the FDA was endangering our health through bureaucratic sluggishness and they succeeded in revising some of the FDA's procedures. Turns out drug and medical manufacturers had donated millions in "charitable" contributions to these groups.

This is our Crime of the Month.



[4/17] CAROL L. COUCH  
1818 PASEO CONQUISTADORA  
SANTA FE NM 87501

6/99

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