

Coalition For Prisoners' Rights Newsletter

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THE GOOD

We know that mass incarceration is bad, that it is often difficult to tell the implications of new developments, and that prison populations have declined somewhat over the past, pandemic, year. All of which makes us both skeptical and hopeful about the May 2 headline: "76K Calif. inmates may get out early -- Good-behavior credits could shorten sentences of nonviolent offenders".

What is being said is: More than 63,000 imprisoned people convicted of violent crimes will be eligible for good behavior credits that will shorten their sentences by one-third, instead of the current one-fifth. That includes nearly 20,000 people doing life sentences *with* the possibility of parole.

It will be months or years before anyone goes free earlier than they expect to.

However, under the change in rules which the current California governmental administration has promulgated unilaterally, more than 10,000 convicted of a second serious but non-violent offense will be eligible for release after serving half of their sentences. The same increased release time will apply to nearly 2,900 nonviolent third strikers. All minimum security prisoners in work camps will be eligible for the same month of earlier release for every month they spend in the camp.

By making these changes "emergency regulations" the agency could impose the new rules without public comment, although permanent regulations must be submitted next year.

The California prison population peaked in 2006 at 160,000. Before the pandemic hit, the population had dropped to 117,000. In the last year, 21,000 more have left state prisons, with about half being held "temporarily" in county jails.

In addition, the California Correctional Center in Susanville CA will close by July 2022. Deuel Vocational Institution in Tracy CA, will close by this October.

Resource: *Californians United for a Responsible Budget (CURE)*, 7625 South Central, Los Angeles CA 90001, 213-864-8931; a statewide coalition.

THE BAD

The March figures for detained at the southern border migrant teens and younger children is: more than 20,000 in Health and Human Services (HHS) shelters, plus 2,200 waiting in cramped border facilities --designed to hold children for a maximum of 72 hours, although many are housed there for a week or longer before for HHS space is available for them. At one Texas facility, 39 children were held at least 15 days. A total of 4,000 people were held there in tents in a space designed for 250. The March 2021 number was roughly double the February number, and more than five times the March 2020 number.

More than 40% of the minors released by the government have at least one parent already living in the U.S. But it has taken more than 20 days to approve such releases and grant custody to those parents. It takes an average of 33 days to release them to other immediate relatives. It costs \$775 per day per child to stay at an emergency shelter. Emergency shelters at convention centers, military bases and converted oil worker camps cost at least \$60 million per week and are expected to continue for months.

The Border Patrol had 168,195 "encounters" with migrants on the southern border in March, its busiest month since March 2001. Of these, 52,904 were with people arriving as families. Mexicans represented the largest proportion and nearly all were single adults. People from Honduras and Guatemala were second and third in number and more than half of them were families or children traveling alone. Numbers increased sharply during the previous president's final year in office, but have further accelerated under the current one, despite other reversals of previous presidential policy.

Vaccine Overdoses in Several Locations

In April, at the Iowa State pen, 77 prisoners received six times the the recommended doses of the Pfizer vaccine, which comes in vials containing six doses. Similar mistakes have been reported with that vaccine occurring in Australia and in Germany. No side effects are reported yet.

A ISRAEL UNA LICENCIA PARA MATAR PALESTINOS

El respaldo de Estados Unidos le ha dado a Israel una licencia para matar y mutilar palestinos. El reciente ataque de Israel a Gaza está convirtiendo la vida en el territorio ocupado en un "infierno absoluto", con el apoyo militar y diplomático de Estados Unidos. Israel tiene licencia total para usar un poder desmedido y matar, destruir y mutilar con impunidad. La constante defensa que el presidente hace de las acciones israelíes refleja la negación y la deshumanización de la que es objeto el pueblo palestino desde hace mucho tiempo. Uno se pregunta qué proporción debe haber entre las muertes árabes, las muertes palestinas y las muertes israelíes. Tiene que llegar a ser veinte a una para que Estados Unidos finalmente comience a reconocer que no se trata de una legítima defensa? Este es un ejemplo perfecto del sesgo que caracteriza la política estadounidense desde hace muchos años.

-- por Hanan Ashrawi & Rashid Khalidi

THE LEAST READ PART OF THE NEWSLETTER

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Please continue to send us address changes, to help us keep our mailing list as accurate as possible.

NONE OF US ARE LAWYERS OR LEGAL WORKERS. Letters to us marked "Legal Mail" can result in our losing access to the prisons they come from.

Many, many thanks to the Real Cost of Prisons project, which posts our Newsletter on-line monthly for free downloading and distribution. All issues since 2009 are at their great site:

realcostofprisons.org

CORRECTION

We thank sharp eyed and conscientious readers who pointed out the factual error in our February 2021 issue: In fact, Texas does indeed have imprisoned people doing LWOP sentences: over 800, according to statistics from January 2018, the latest ones we could find. The U.S. total with LWOP, life with parole and 50 year or more sentences: more than 200,000. Which comes to one in seven prisoners. More than two-thirds of those with such lifelong sentences are people of color.

& THE UGLY

Israel's latest assault on Gaza is turning life in that besieged territory into sheer hell, aided by U.S. military and diplomatic support. Israel has total license to use unbridled power to kill and destroy and maim, according to the Palestinian scholar Hanan Ashrawi. The U.S. president's continued defense of Israeli actions reflect long-standing erasure and dehumanization of Palestinians. "One wonders what proportion you have to have of Arab deaths, of Palestinian deaths, over Israeli deaths. Is it 20 to 1 before the United States finally begins to recognize that this is not legitimate self-defense? This is a perfect illustration of the bias that has been a feature of U.S. policy for many, many years." stated Rashid Khalidi, university teacher.

The Israeli occupation forces have once again targeted an area that is the most densely populated area in the world, that is under a state of siege. They have nowhere to go, nowhere to hide. They don't have sirens. They don't have shelters. They don't have an air force. They have no protection whatsoever. And the Israeli's started bombing and shelling, by air primarily. They escalated. They're destroying roads and streets, infrastructure, electricity and so on. And they're turning life in Gaza, which was already a disaster area as a result of the siege—they're turning it into sheer hell.

U.S. NUMBERS IN FOR-PROFIT PRISONS

In 31 states plus the federal government together incarcerated a total of 116,000 people in for-profit prisons in 2019. That was 8% of the total state and federal prison population then. The number of people housed in for-profit prisons has increased by 33% since 2000. Montana held 47% of its prison population then and New Mexico approximately 46% in for-profits. There were 19 states in which there were no for-profit prisons.

In 2019, 81% of the detained immigrant population, nearly 41,000 people, were held in for-profit prisons.

Visiting Program Availability for Prisoners

Hope is increasing for re-opening of visiting with more vaccination programs underway for those imprisoned. The only one we know of for sure is in Tennessee. As of early May, it was: "Visitation is reopened at all Tennessee prisons effective April 10th by appointment only."

No Hurry Apparent in Prison Suit

No oral arguments are scheduled yet in the November suit concerning New Mexico prison conditions during the pandemic.