Letter from the Editor

Brothers and Sisters,

Welcome to this Black August edition of Solid Black Fist. In this issue we highlight the call to action, reflect on the tragic circumstances which sparked the call and look forward to those events taking place across the country on behalf of your demands. The list of endorsing organizations continues to grow substantially, please take a look and see what organizations have endorsed in your region.

I’m sending a call for stamps, the number of participants have increased and as a result the number of prisoners who wish to receive this newsletter has also increased. We want to be able to provide newsletters to every incarcerated participant. If you’re able to support SawariMi’s production of Solid Black Fist, please do so by sending stamps to the return address. For those that are able to send 20 stamps or more I will create a special gift for your contribution to the production and distribution of this newsletter, a poster of photographs consolidated from 2018’s National Prison Strike events. Events will be taking place across the country and I’ll be collecting images that were captured and designing a poster, for those that are able to contribute 20 stamps or more that poster will be sent after the strike at the end of September. I appreciate your support!

In solidarity,
Amani Sawari (@SawariMi)
aswarimi.org

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SLAVERY NEVER ENDED: CALL FOR NATIONAL PRISON STRIKE #AUGUST21

By Jailhouse Lawyers Speak, IWOC July 24, 2018| popularresistance.org

This Call Is For A Two-Week National Strike Beginning On Aug. 21, The Anniversary Of George Jackson’s Assassination, And Extending Until Sept. 9, The Anniversary Of The Attica Prison Rebellion In 1971. The Call Has Been Taken Up Inside From Coast To Coast, And Across At Least 17 Different States. The Author Of This Call, Jailhouse Lawyers Speak, Is A National Collective Of Incarcerated People Who Fight For Human Rights By Providing Other Incarcerated People With Access To Legal Education, Resources And Assistance.

Men and women incarcerated in prisons across the nation declare a nationwide strike in response to the riot in Lee Correctional Institution, a maximum security prison in South Carolina. Seven comrades lost their lives during a senseless uprising that could have been avoided had the prison not been so overcrowded from the greed wrought by mass incarceration and a lack of respect for human life that is embedded in our nation’s penal ideology.

These men and women are demanding humane living conditions, access to rehabilitation, sentencing reform and the end of modern day slavery.

These are the NATIONAL DEMANDS of the men and women in federal, immigration and state prisons:

1. Immediate improvements to the conditions of prisons and prison policies that recognize the humanity of imprisoned men and women.
2. An immediate end to prison slavery. All persons imprisoned in any place of detention under United States jurisdiction must be paid the prevailing wage in their state or territory for their labor.
3. Rescission of the Prison Litigation Reform Act, allowing imprisoned humans a proper channel to address grievances and violations of their rights.
4. Rescission of the Truth in Sentencing Act and the Sentencing Reform Act so that imprisoned humans have a possibility of rehabilitation and parole. No human shall be sentenced to death by incarceration or serve any sentence without the possibility of parole.
5. An immediate end to the racial overcharging, over-sentencing and parole denials of Black and brown humans. Black humans shall no longer be denied parole because the victim of the crime was white, which is a particular problem in Southern states.
6. An immediate end to racist gang enhancement laws targeting Black and Brown humans.
7. No denial of access to rehabilitation programs for imprisoned humans at their place of detention because of their label as a violent offender.
8. State prisons must be funded specifically to offer more rehabilitation services.
9. Reinstatement of Pell grant eligibility to prisoners in all US states and territories.
10. Recognition of voting rights for all confined citizens serving prison sentences, pretrial detainees and so-called “ex-felons.” Their votes must be counted. Representation is demanded. All voices count!

We all agree to spread this strike throughout the prisons of Amerikkka! From Aug. 21 to Sept. 9, 2018, men and women in prisons across the nation will strike in the following manner:

1. Work Strikes: Prisoners will not report to assigned jobs. Each place of detention will determine how long its strike will last. Some of these strikes may translate into a local list of demands designed to improve conditions and reduce harm within the prison.
2. Sit-ins: In certain prisons, men and women will engage in peaceful sit-in protests.
3. Boycotts: All spending should be halted. We ask those outside the walls not to make financial judgments for those inside. Men and women on the inside will inform you if they are participating in this boycott. We support the call of the Free Alabama Movement Campaign to “Redistribute the Pain” 2018, as Bennu Hannibal Ra-Sun, formerly known as Melvin Ray, has laid out – with the exception of refusing visitation. See these principles described here: https://redistributethepain.wordpress.com/.
4. Hunger Strikes: Men and women shall refuse to eat.

How you can help:

- Make the nation take a look at our demands. Demand action on our demands by contacting your local, state and federal political representatives with these demands. Ask them where they stand.
- Spread the strike and word of the strike in every place of detention.
- Contact a supporting local organization to see how you can be supportive. If you are unsure of who to connect with, email millionsforprisonersmarch@gmail.com.
- Be prepared by making contact with people in prison, family members of prisoners and prisoner support organizations in your state to assist in notifying the public and media on strike conditions.
- Assist in our announced initiatives to have the votes of people in jail and prison counted in elections.

Inmates Lives Matter (too)

By Dennis Boatwright II

The brutal murder of scores of unarmed African American males by mostly White police officers spurred the founding of the Black Lives Matter movement. Although the majority of confined African Americans wholeheartedly cheer the growing international recognition of the Black Lives Matter movement, many are asking: What about us? They point out that the same racially motivated attacks on African American men by armed White law enforcement in society is more intense, brutal, and occurs with greater frequency inside the U.S. prison system. The difference, they assert, is that the attacks on prisoners are impossible to be recorded on cell phones as some police brutality incidents
are in society. It is very difficult to dismiss these accusations as baseless. Recall that the ringleaders in the most notorious prisoner-abuse scandal in modern history was orchestrated and carried out by former prison guards that were deployed to aid in the second invasion of Iraq in 2003. In that scandal ex-prison guard Charles Graner and other personnel of the U.S. Army were photographed inside Iraq’s infamous Abu Ghraib prison committing the most despicable human rights violations that included sexual abuse, torture and murder.

When one reads the graphic accounts of inmate abuse and murder published in _Prison Legal News_ and other human rights publications, or listen to the harrowing personal accounts of prisoners, something like an Inmate Lives Matter movement is long overdue.

In one instance, five white supremacist California prison guards blacked both eyes and broke the arm of a prisoner, then placed the unconscious 19-year-old inmate in solitary confinement because they were offended by a drawing of Nelson Mandela he hung inside his cell wall. In another incident, a Michigan inmate told an audience of concerned citizens during a telephone interview that he got transferred to a supermax prison because he was overheard complaining to other prisoners about how they are forced to eat molded bread and rotten apples and bananas in order to save the Michigan Department of Corrections money.

In order to stop this form of oppression, the mistreatment and physical abuse of prisoners should be treated as human rights violations that fall under the protections of the Eighth Amendment of the U.S. Constitution that explicitly forbids cruel and unusual punishment of anyone. In spite of 8th Amendment protections, prison officials will fight tooth and nail to maintain the status quo to protect their $80 billion annual budget. That is, they will continue to violate the rights of prisoners because in the overall scheme of things, prison officials and some U.S. corporations profit from how prisons are ran.

Concerned citizens also must contact elected officials, religious and community leaders, and prison employees to voice disapproval of prisoner abuse. But expressing outrage is not enough. Concerned citizens must roll up their sleeves and get serious about this issue and form organizations to effectively put an end to human rights abuses in U.S. prisons.

(Dennis Boatwright II was himself incarcerated 24 years. His confinement gave him first-hand knowledge of the mistreatment and abuse of prisoners he writes about. He is currently writing _The Struggle Behind the Walls_, a book that highlights and explains prisoner-led resistance movements in U.S. prisons that most in society are unaware of. On August 23, 2018 Dennis will be protesting in Lansing, Michigan to show solidarity for a nationwide prisoner strike beginning August 21st till September 9th.)

*First caption shows Dennis wearing Inmate Lives Matter shirt.

* Second caption shows Dennis standing with a group of organizers and attendees of a Lansing, Michigan event who wanted to ask him questions regarding the thoughts he shared with the audience.

Dennis can be reached at 313 397-7744, or dsboatwright43@gmail.com
Dozens rally outside Lee Correctional Institute for prisoner's rights

By Rosalia Fodera May 19, 2018 | https://wpde.com/

LEE COUNTY, SC (WPDE) — Dozens rallied outside Lee Correctional Institution for prisoner's rights Saturday. It’s been over a month since a prison fight there left 7 dead and even more hospitalized.

Kristina Voloch’s fiancé is serving a 13 year prison sentence at McCormick Correctional Institution for possession with intent to sell and she’s fighting for change in the state's prisons. "We are looking for better treatment of the inmates we're looking for better living conditions," Voloch said. The rally was outside Lee Correctional Institution to be a voice for those inside. Whether they know someone in prison or not, they were pushing against what they say is mass incarceration. "People incarcerated are human beings and they deserve basic human rights and we will not stop fighting," Kymberly Smith said. It was put on by the Party for Socialism and Liberation, Students for Justice in Palestine, and the Young Democratic Socialists also helped organize the rally. They’re also supporting a list of 10 prisoner demands that they say will improve conditions at prisons. "They’re making product, hosiery, and not getting paid at least minimum wage," Smith said. They talked directly to the officers standing outside asking them to speak up about the April 15th fight if they know something. "We wanted to show them that we are here. We are physically here for them," Smith said. Smith is an organizer with the party and says they’re also supporting the prisoners' planned strike that Smith says is planned to start August 21st. "They’re gonna strike from all work, they’re going to strike from all activities, they have their own plans in place about what they’re actually going to do inside of the prison, but no work will be done," Smith said. Some people we talked to off camera, that didn't attend the rally, say they don't agree and prisoners are prisoners for a reason. They didn’t want to go on camera because they say it's a sensitive issue.

We reached out to SCDC office for comment about the rally and the planned strike but we have not hear back.
“Prison Reform” Bill Stalled in Senate as National Prison Strike Looms

By Ali Mohsin | August 1, 2018| www.counterpunch.org

One of the more curious developments in recent months has been the bipartisan effort to pass the First Step Act, a “prison reform” bill that was approved by the House of Representatives in May. If passed by the Senate, the bill will lead to some minor improvements in the treatment of prisoners currently incarcerated in federal prison. However, the bill won’t reduce mandatory minimum sentences, nor will it give judges the discretion necessary to show leniency during sentencing. It is for this reason that dozens of civil rights organizations, including the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) have consistently opposed it. On the other hand, the bill has received enthusiastic support from people like Jared Kushner and the Koch Brothers, demonstrating its toothless character.

The First Step Act is currently stalled in the Senate due to opposition from conservatives opposed to any sort criminal justice reform. The bill also faces opposition from some Senate Democrats who admit that it fails to seriously address the problem of mass incarceration. In this vein, Cory Booker and Kamala Harris, two of the more ambitious Democratic politicians, have come out against the bill, likely viewing it as an opportunity to distinguish themselves and boost their political profiles. Senate Judiciary Committee Chairman Chuck Grassley, R-Iowa has also voiced opposition to the bill. Grassley, along with Sen. Dick Durbin, D-III had sponsored a rival bill, the Sentencing Reform and Corrections Act (SRCA), which would have reduced mandatory minimum sentences for several drug-related offenses, although convicts would still face decades behind bars. The SRCA eventually lost out to the much weaker First Step Act. It bears mentioning that, should the First Step Act be passed, it would only apply to the people currently incarcerated in federal prison. But according to the Prison Policy Initiative, out of the 2.3 million people currently incarcerated in the US, only 225,000 are held in federal prison. The vast majority of prisoners in the US are incarcerated in state prisons and local jails.

The cynical maneuvering around this bogus “reform” bill once again reminds us that we can’t expect the venal political elite to bring about genuine change. Such change can only be achieved by direct action on the part of those oppressed and exploited under our capitalist, white supremacist system, of which mass incarceration is a defining feature.
The good news is that prisoners across the US are about to launch their own direct action campaign. Indeed, on August 21, an unprecedented nationwide prison strike will begin. The strike was called by prisoners in response to the deadly riot at Lee Correctional Institution, an overcrowded maximum security prison in South Carolina where inmates must endure inhumane conditions. 7 prisoners were killed in the riot last April, which was instigated by prison officials. The prisoners are going on strike to demand humane living conditions, access to rehabilitation, sentencing reform and an end to prison slavery. Some of their other demands include rescinding the Prison Litigation Reform Act and giving prisoners a proper channel to address grievances and violations of their rights, an immediate end to over-sentencing and parole denials of Black and brown people and an end to sentences without the possibility of parole.

The strike will see prisoners refusing to work, participating in sit-ins, refraining from spending money and engaging in hunger strikes. The precise tactics will differ from prison to prison depending on the needs and concerns of the people confined there. The strike has been endorsed by dozens of left-wing organizations and prison abolitionist groups including the Incarcerated Workers Organizing Committee, the Metropolitan Anarchist Coordinating Council and the Revolutionary Abolitionist Movement. Prisoners are asking supporters on the outside to spread the word about the strike, attend solidarity demonstrations and pressure elected officials to accept their demands.

The imprisoned humans who will participate in the strike are doing so at great risk to themselves. In recent years, prisoners fighting for more humane conditions have been punished by vindictive officials at prisons across the US. When prisoners in Florida launched a labor strike last January to demand fair wages, prison officials responded by throwing strike organizers in solitary confinement.

The national prison strike couldn’t have come soon enough. American politicians love describing other countries as ‘failed states,’ but what do you call a country that incarcerates so many of its own citizens? Most people are already aware that the US has the world’s highest incarceration rate. Less well known is the fact that the US has more people (536,000) detained before trial than most countries have in their prisons and jails combined. The poor are forced to rot in jail while waiting for trial while the rich can afford to buy their way out. In 2015, this class-based justice system claimed the life of Kalief Browder, a prisoner at New York’s Rikers Island jail who committed suicide after enduring torture and solitary confinement. Browder had spent 3 years awaiting trial at Rikers after he was accused of stealing a backpack at the age of 16.

Mass incarceration takes a devastating not only on prisoners, but on their families and communities as well. More than half of the people in prison are parents to minors. The families of incarcerated people, often impoverished to begin with, are largely abandoned by the state. Studies have shown that children of incarcerated parents are more likely to forego medical care and use hard drugs. They also have higher rates of depression, PTSD, asthma and HIV.

The prison system exist because the ruling class needs a place to keep those who come out on the losing end of their rotten system. In a country where the richest .01 percent own 90 percent of the wealth, scores of people are denied a chance at a decent life. It shouldn’t surprise anyone that some people end up resorting to crime when their only other options are minimum wage jobs or joining the military. The real criminals are those at the top of the capitalist hierarchy, the beneficiaries of a system based on exploitation. The upcoming prison strike is a rebellion against structural oppression and inequality. It deserves your support and solidarity.

Endorsements, Organizations in Solidarity

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The most up to date list of endorsements can be found online at [http://sawarimi.org/groups-organizations-in-solidarity](http://sawarimi.org/groups-organizations-in-solidarity)

Additional Organizations can register and provide their endorsement online at [http://sawarimi.org/national-prison-strike](http://sawarimi.org/national-prison-strike)

**Messages from Endorsers:**

“The Tennessee Prison Books Project stands in solidarity with the National Prison Strike and calls for an end to all cages.” -Tennessee Prison Books Project

“As we in the Revolutionary Action Movement are driven by the love of our people to take actions that destroy oppression and create liberation, we are in solidarity with the incarcerated workers in the planned national strike. We are based in North Carolina off of Winston Salem State University and look forward to connecting and learning how we can support the strike locally.” -Revolutionary Action Movement (R.A.M.)

“The DSA National Climate & Environmental Justice Working Group steering committee has voted to sign on in solidarity with the national prison strike- we are proud to be standing with all incarcerated people and recognize the necessity of prison abolition for an ecosocialist future. We will do everything we can to spread this message far and wide and encourage local DSA climate activists to turn out to solidarity events.” -DSA National Climate & Environmental Justice Working Group

**Submission Info:** In addition to publishing content raising awareness about the strike and providing updates on related demonstration and its progress, the Solid Black Fist Newsletter also accepts work from prisoners in the form of articles, art and poetry as well as the contribution of stamps. This demonstration and its campaigns are about you and our most meaningful contributions come from the inside. For those who contribute 20 stamps or more a custom poster will be mailed at the end of September. For readers interested in submitting their work: typed and printed can be sent to the return address or emailed to prisonstrikemedia@gmail.com; carbon copy: amanisawari@gmail.com

**Official Site:** [http://sawarimi.org/national-prison-strike](http://sawarimi.org/national-prison-strike)

**Additional Copies of this Newsletter can be found at [http://sawarimi.org/npsnewsletter](http://sawarimi.org/npsnewsletter)**
Sawari Mi
14419 Greenwood Ave N.
STE A #132
Seattle, WA 98133

Basic Principles for the Treatment of Prisoners

1. All prisoners shall be treated with the respect due to their inherent dignity and value as human beings.

2. There shall be no discrimination on the grounds of race, color, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status.

3. It is, however, desirable to respect the religious beliefs and cultural precepts of the group to which prisoners belong, whenever local conditions so require.

4. The responsibility of prisons for the custody of prisoners and for the protection of society against crime shall be discharged in keeping with a State’s other social objectives and its fundamental responsibilities for promoting the well-being and development of all members of society.

5. Except for those limitations that are demonstrably necessitated by the fact of incarceration, all prisoners shall retain the human rights and fundamental freedoms set out in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and, where the State concerned is a party, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the Optional Protocol thereto, as well as such other rights as are set out in other United Nations covenants.

6. All prisoners shall have the right to take part in cultural activities and education aimed at the full development of the human personality.

7. Efforts addressed to the abolition of solitary confinement as a punishment, or to the restriction of its use, should be undertaken and encouraged.

8. Conditions shall be created enabling prisoners to undertake meaningful remunerated employment which will facilitate their reintegration into the country’s labor market and permit them to contribute to their own financial support and to that of their families.

9. Prisoners shall have access to the health services available in the country without discrimination on the grounds of their legal situation.

10. With the participation and help of the community and social institutions, and with due regard to the interests of victims, favorable conditions shall be created for the reintegration of the ex-prisoner into society under the best possible conditions.

11. The above Principles shall be applied impartially.