

THE KITE

★ Working to Extend Democracy to All ★

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REMEMBERING ATTICA: FORTY-SEVEN YEARS LATER

By Ed Mead

On September 13, 1978, prisoners at Walla Walla celebrated Attica Day by holding a sparsely attended memorial talent show in the prison's auditorium. On September 13, 1979, the Washington Coalition Against Prisons (WaCAP) braved heavy rain to stage a rally in Olympia to protest overcrowding and other oppressive aspects of Washington's prison system. On September 13, 1980, the annual Attica Day event in Washington state took the form of a conference in Seattle on prison work. There has not been an Attica Day celebration in this state since.

This September 13th marks the 47th anniversary of the Attica uprising. It is a good time for prisoners to stop and ask, "Why an Attica Day?" There are several good reasons. Firstly, it is important for prisoners still working for progress to honor their

comrades who have fallen in the struggle for justice. Secondly, it is essential for us on the inside to understand the lessons of Attica, both positive and negative, so that such losses can be minimized in the future. Thirdly, the uprising at Attica represents a symbol of resistance and the birth of a greater prisoners' movement during the 1970s.

To appreciate the events at Attica it is first necessary to put them in proper political and historical context. Today many prisoners view justice as nothing more than a cop's bullet in the back or as endless years of meaningless confinement. That's bourgeois justice. What the brothers at Attica were fighting for is proletarian justice, which is an end to the system that perpetuates the destructive cycle that imprisonment represents. They wanted us to see their rebellion as one battle in a continuous struggle waged on an international level, not just one isolated incident.

The Attica uprising was a spontaneous event. It happened because the material conditions for resistance were ripe. There had been political study groups in most of the major wings, and prisoner consciousness had been developed to a point where the entire population could act as a single fist. Sam Mellvill, an Attica prisoner, had been publishing a little underground paper he wrote by hand, with as many carbon copies as he could make. It was called the *Iced Pig*.

Well thought out demands had been drawn up and submitted to the state's corrections bureaucracy for resolution. When no action was taken by officials, prisoners backed their demands with a ten-day

peaceful work strike. The strike ended with a shopping cart full of pious promises that were never honored. Then, on August 21, 1971, when George Jackson was murdered at San Quentin, Attica cons wore black armbands and boycotted the mess-hall for a day. All these actions reflected a high degree of political unity.

On September 9, 1971, less than a month after the boycott, a fight broke out in one of the wings. Through an unusual combination of circumstances, such as prisoners inadvertently gaining access to an important gate, the fight erupted into a riot and takeover of sections of the prison, including D-Yard. Even though the rebellion was not planned, D Yard prisoners quickly and efficiently organized themselves into a commune. They had no weapons to speak of (a few homemade shanks) and their level of outside support was negligible.

The rebelling prisoners seemed to be aware of their weaknesses, as they immediately called upon cons in other New York prisons and the progressive community on the outside to back their play. This call was made through the mass media, the presence of which was a precondition to negotiations. Another precondition was the formation of an observer team selected by the prisoners. These and other threshold demands indicate how conscious the prisoners were of their vulnerability; they also reflected a deep level of understanding as to what was necessary to overcome their weaknesses.

The observer team consisted of liberals like Tom Wicker of the *New York Times* and radicals from leftist political organizations, like Jesse Jackson. While the media

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and observer team were successful in terms of winning a substantial amount of public opinion in favor of the prisoners, the men in D Yard needed more than moral support. No other prisons went down. And the left did nothing to support the brothers. To top it all off, when push came to shove, when the state told the observer team to clear the yard so they could launch their attack on the prisoners, these observers, the same men who had been championing the cause of the prisoners in the press, left the yard and thus exposed the brothers to the guns of the state. They were slaughtered at the hands of state police and prison guards behind those guns. Forty-three people were killed.

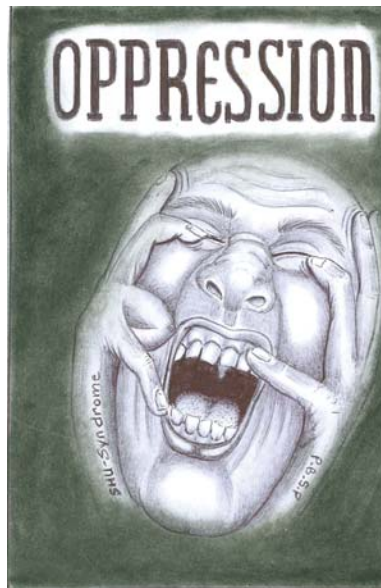
Of course ultimate responsibility for the massacre at Attica belongs in the lap of then governor Rockefeller, whose whole family maintains its position in the ruling class by the murder (e.g., the 1914 Ludowe, Colorado, massacre of miners) and exploitation of poor and working people. Even so, Rockefeller would have been hard pressed to order the attack if those claiming to be supportive of the struggle had actively been so. Besides leaving the prisoners vulnerable by not joining them in the yard, the radicals and left leaders failed to mobilize the extensive progressive community in New York City. These people and the loved ones of the men inside could have surrounded the prison in a non-violent vigil until the conflict was resolved. Moreover, due to a long and deeply entrenched tradition of opportunism, the left did not possess the capacity to defend people like the Attica Brothers with all levels of support. Given these weaknesses, it is easy to see why Rockefeller thought he could get away with ordering the September 13th military attack on the unarmed prisoners.

The tactic implemented by the prisoners of Attica, although it exposed the naked violence of the state to a complacent public and raised prisoners' consciousness to a higher level, was a political defeat—and a very expensive one at that. This is not to say that D Yard prisoners were all wrong. There were both positive and negative aspects to the uprising. To glean the lessons, however, we must examine the negative, the weaknesses, in an effort to transform weakness into strength. That's what the struggle is all about; fight, learn, fight some more, learn some more, and so on until victory.

One central weakness of Attica stands out above all others: the general absence of

prisoner organization until after the uprising was an accomplished fact. Of course people sometimes erupt into spontaneous and violent resistance to their oppressors—who can blame them. But if the object is to win, as it must be, then political action should be organized and disciplined and guided by advanced political theory. And when these things exist, it is not necessary to resort to such self-destructive tactics as those used at Attica.

The high degree of political consciousness possessed by the Attica rebels is reflected in their demand for transportation to a non-imperialist country. Yet either because of a lack of patience or allowing unfolding events to get ahead of them, they did not build any formal organization prior to the revolt. With the necessary organization and theory, they could have organized themselves, then other state institutions, developed trained outside support networks, and otherwise set the stage for a long term mass struggle.



Naturally it is easier to view past events from the comfortable perspective of hindsight than it is to actually participate in a complex experience like the uprising at Attica. Nothing said here should be construed to detract from the strong spirit of the comrades who made those terrible sacrifices in D Yard. But since Attica did happen, future generations of prisoners can learn from the experience. The Attica cons went too far too fast; moving without taking the time to build a broad base of support. The state's response was to ruthlessly smash these budding efforts to resist, a job that was made easier through the exploitation of prisoner weaknesses.

As mentioned earlier, this September

13th marks the 47th year since the massacre at Attica, an anniversary that should be honored by prisoners everywhere. These long years have not been good ones in terms of progress for prisoners. Dozens of prisons have experienced riots and hostage takings during this period; most of which ended in the loss of prisoner lives (either by their captors or, as in the case of New Mexico, at the hands of their fellow prisoners). There is little to indicate that the lessons of Attica have been learned, let alone internalized. As a result, the situation today is far worse in most respects than it was then. There is no decent level of outside support. Prisoners are not organized by institution, let alone on a statewide or national level. And the current degree of political sophistication on the inside is shallow at best and in most joints downright reaction reigns supreme. It doesn't appear as if this will change any time soon.

Who is to blame for today's material conditions? If one put the finger on opportunist leadership, they would probably not be far off the mark. But a more important question to ask is where to from here? This writer has not run across anyone with all the answers. Still, a few general lessons can be drawn from past experience.

First, the advocates of "off the pigs" and "burn it to the ground" should have their perspectives examined in the light of reality. They burned McAlester down in the early '70s, but has that improved the lot of prisoners there? No! The same for New Mexico. Prisoners in those and other joints are still overcrowded, degraded, powerless, and no nearer to making forward progress. Similarly, prisoners in California have been killing guards (when they aren't busy murdering each other) for years without any substantial change resulting from it. Instead of acts against low level flunkies or quickly replaced prison property, people should prepare for the peaceful, long-range struggle that lies ahead.

One area of important work that can be done now is the formation of study groups aimed at deepening our understanding of progressive political theory. The *Prison Art Project* will soon be offering books on the philosophy of dialectical and historical materialism. Unlike organizing on the inside, studying politics is an area of activity that is somewhat protected by the first amendment. Building such study groups will be an important step for those who would hope to pick up the crimson banner of Attica and carry it forward. ●

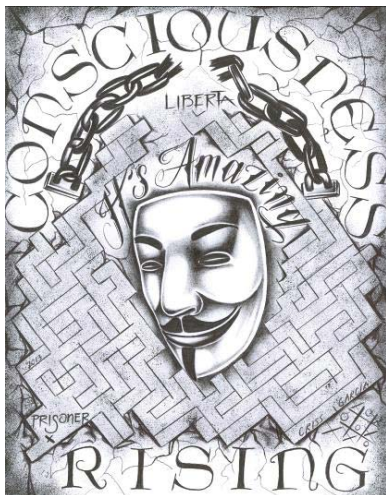
EDITORIAL COMMENTS

One of the purposes of this little newsletter is to bring you news and analysis from a perspective you won't be getting from the bourgeois media outlets. We'll report on what's going on with prisoners from around the world, women prisoners, the struggle against IMUs and long-term solitary confinement, case law updates, and so much more. We want to demonstrate that there are solutions to the problem of constitutionally sanctioned slavery for those millions of disenfranchised prisoners struggling behind bars.

The editors of this newsletter are white and black, male and female, gay and straight. Most of us are ex-cons too. In fact, just three of our six editors have the combined experience of over a hundred years behind bars.

Yeah, we sort of know what we're talking about. How committed are we? This writer, for example, was accused of busting into the headquarters of the department of corrections in Olympia and planting a powerful bomb under the desk of a top prisonrat. The blast did structural damage to the five-story building. The George Jackson Brigade issued a communique pointing out how the men in the IMU were being brutalized by guards for trying to struggle for democracy on the inside.

My name is Ed Mead and I was the co-founder of *Prison Legal News* and many other prisoner-oriented publications. For 15 years I was the editor of the *Prison Focus* newspaper, and the publisher of the monthly *Rock* newsletter (for six years). These publications were aimed at California prisoners, both before, during, and after the three historic hunger strikes by that



state's convicts, the last of which had some 33,000 prisoners participating (and won the release of thousands of SHU prisoners).

It is our hope to work to make social prisoners more rights conscious, and rights conscious prisoners more class conscious. Actually, you may know of me for other reasons, like winning conjugal visits for this state's prisoners (or what's left of them these days).. And a whole lot of other advances we made for you back in the mid-1970s, nearly all of which you have since managed to passively squander away.

There's a great quote attributed to Harriet Tubman: "I freed 1000 slaves. I could have freed a 1000 more if they only knew that they were slaves." We have that same problem here in this state—slaves of the state who do not realize they are slaves. And it is this status as slave, sanctioned by the Thirteenth Amendment, from which nearly all the evils of imprisonment flow.

I became involved in the struggle against that aspect of the Thirteenth Amendment back in 1978, and I've not given up yet. Just stop and think, if prisoners had the right to vote, for example, think of the local politicians who'd be clamoring for your vote, think of the promises they'd be making to you. But of course, this change requires years of patient, peaceful struggle.

If instant gratification is not quick enough for you, then this is probably not the publication for you. If you're all about looking out for number one and to hell with everyone else (the capitalist ideology), then this newsletter is not for you. But if you believe in a better future for you and the millions of others locked down, then we might be a voice that can help bring about that better world. If you fall into this latter category, your first step should be to support this newsletter, as we will need your help in order to make this newsletter into your publication.

We will need your articles and letters to help make this little rag a true reflection of your needs, interests, and aspirations. In addition to your articles and letters, we will need your financial support. Sell subscriptions to other prisoners, donate what you can from your own pocket. *The Rock* newsletter was completely supported by California prisoner donations for years. Mark and I also sank over \$10,000 of our money into the California struggle, today we survive on Social Security as our only income, which isn't much since the two of us spent so much time behind bars (35 years for me, 40 years for Mark Cook). ●

A BRIEF TOUCH OF HISTORY

By Janine Bertram

Nineteen years ago a group of prisoners in Washington and outside prison organizers decided on a test to find out how much support there was for truly making prisons better. Everyone knows that prisons can only keep functioning if that prisoners do all the work for next to nothing in pay. Many call it slavery. For some years progressive prisoners and people outside have said that the only way real change, real improvement will happen in prisons is when prisoners organize themselves and stop work.

So in 1997 people on the outside and several prisoners agreed to a test. On a certain day everyone imprisoned in Washington State would stop work. On the same day, all the outside supporters would hold a demonstration at the Seattle Courthouse. This test would show what kind of strength was on the inside and what kind of strength was on the outside.

Guess what happened. The day of the test was extremely rainy and stormy and only 30 outside supporters came and demonstrated outside Seattle's King County Jail. Not a huge number.

In Monroe only 30% of the prisoners went on strike. In Walla Walla the number was 40%. McNeil Island, 33%. It would have been better but a prisoner at Clallam Bay informed the prison administration of the plan. Alleged prisoner "leaders" were locked up around the state.

But the real strength was the women of Purdy. 100% of the prisoners in Purdy did not work *and did not eat*. Back then the women stood strong. It's interesting to imagine what it would be like now. ●



AROUSING THOUGHT WHILE BUILDING PUBLIC OPINION

“Without preparedness superiority is not real superiority and there can be no initiative either. Having grasped this point, a force which is inferior but prepared can often defeat a superior enemy...” (1)

By Jose H. Villarreal, Pelican Bay Prison

Introduction [Part One of Two]

It has been said that writing is an art form. It can in certain instances be seen as an art, but when it comes to power struggles writing becomes necessary for survival. The prison writer to be specific is confined on many levels, where the prisoners is most free is in the theoretical realm. Because prison struggles for human rights is a protracted struggle, this means the prisoner needs to use everything accessible, including the pen and paper.

Prison literature which is created by the captive from our perspective is a weapon because it can be empowering and liberating. When prisoners create articles, theory or critiques it not just teaches other prisoners and sparks deeper analysis within the prison masses, but it also shines a light on these concentration camps and helps to raise the awareness of these camps. In this sense prison lit. educates both sides of the prison walls and draws more into the struggle for prisoner's rights and human rights more generally.

It is critical that Lumpen understand what their political position is in this society. How can one change a situation without understanding it in the first place? The fact that the U.S. has millions imprisoned can't be understood fully without knowing what creates these conditions that necessitate so many to be entombed. The fact that “crimes” were broken is not what this mass imprisonment is about, as I will get into in this writing, it goes far deeper than this.

Discovering our power will not just be realized through the physical realm with future strikes and prisoners' worker's unions, but it will also surface through our literature. Once harnessed prison writers and theoreticians will be one of our biggest weapons in our quest for rights. Ending torture and solitary confinement will be one step in our march toward liberation on a grander scale. Our writers will play a role in this reality to finally spring forth. All great movements and revolutions have always had writers at the helm in the process

and the prison movement for human rights will be no different.

There are many different approaches for striking up an assessment or theory of our social reality. Some may tie history into our current situation, others may raise rhetorical questions or create theory of our situation. All of these efforts are important and add to a growing collection of contemporary prison thought. This is important because thought leads to practice. No people or nation was ever liberated without thought and practice. They feed off of each other and propel a people forward through a painful process of learning from ones mistakes, of learning from history or to put it politically, through historical materialism. Writers do, and always have helped contribute to this process.

When Words Sprout from Concrete and Oppression

Writers in general are the translators of truth, the bearers of truth. The writer at once perceives the world in which they exist, captures it and delivers this reality to the people. At times the writer wraps this reality in flowery language, adds humor to the message or nudges the reader along in nuance. Either way the writer becomes the conveyor of truth, whether it be a good or bad truth. The writer thus enshrines a phenomenon on to the printed page for the writer's peers to grapple with as well as future generations to learn from.

For the prison writer it is much more of a consuming process because of the dire situation and realities that prison writers must contend with. Our literature is birthed through a canal of brutality and at times torture. For those in control units and especially in solitary confinement writing becomes a struggle of survival. For many their sanity dangles by a thread, and for others the struggle for justice compels one to use words as weaponized ideas which resist what is occurring in U.S. prisons.

The state does not take too kindly to the prison writer, or any writer for that matter. Those who challenge the state and help to highlight their dirty deeds are met with more repression or complete isolation. At times the prisoner will be prevented or hindered greatly from expressing oneself or tackling a phenomenon. The ability to educate the public is almost always frowned upon by the state. In Califas the state often

labels prison writings as “gang activity”. This is done because the state understands the power of words.

In history, prisons around the world have always suppressed or attempted to suppress prison voices, especially those which spoke on behalf of the voiceless. The oppressed and colonized have always faced censorship from the oppressor nation, this has always been a part of the colonization process. But prisoners, and especially revolutionary prisoners are a resourceful bunch and these writers have always found ways to continue to write. Writing then is a form of resistance.

Throughout history if we look at writers we find many who have been imprisoned for one reason or another. Cervantez, Voltaire and Rousseau are but a few who have been imprisoned and who continued to write from within a cell. For the prison writer, earmarking daily struggles against oppression and forms of resistance for future writing becomes second nature, as fluid as the ink coloring the paper.

Prisoners are the fertilizer for repressive shoots. For most prisoners repression comes with all the other state issued “fish kit” right alongside your tooth brush and blankets. But some of the people's greatest thinkers have done their best theoretical works within the most extreme forms of prison repression. The concrete cell in which they were held seemed to only enhance their ability to see their reality more clearly. Stripped of all bribes and illusion of the society in which they lived they were able to not just explain their concrete reality, but then envision a better way forward not just for prisoners, but for society as well. Their vision transcended the prison walls and scaled the fences in order to pave the theoretical way forward. In this way the prison writer is freer than many outside prison walls.

Lenin's first major study was his first book THE DEVELOPMENT OF CAPITALISM IN RUSSIA which he wrote while he was in prison. Because of Lenin's revolutionary activity, the Czarist state sent Lenin to a Siberian prison which was a torturous experience. The intention was to break Lenin into subservience. His understanding of his social reality lead him not to give up, but to continue to struggle even from within his prison cell and continue to write which culminated in his literary

work, This work would be a contribution to the Russian people outside of prisons who were struggling to understand the political reality of Czarist Russia. In this sense Lenin added to building awareness, to building public opinion of what was occurring in Russia. And he did this from within a prison cell.

In Calitas George Jackson wrote his book "Soledad Brother" from within a prison cell. This was a time when prisoners did not have half the things that we have now. Some things were better, but a lot of things were worse. Repression was more present. Even though he may have been in the hole George continued to write and agitate through the pen. His writings also led to the book "Blood In My Eye" which was also written in prison. The prison walls do not water down the effectiveness and power of words, one only needs to look to how most U.S prisons continue to ban the books of George Jackson to see this.

As prisoners our observations and thought may be even more powerful than if we were outside spectators, because we give an assessment of the contemporary prison experience which is live and in color. The oppression is not in the abstract because we breathe it and live it daily so it becomes clear to us and we can penetrate its essence and hear its heartbeat.

Ricardo Flores Magon was another great prison writer. He wrote consistently from his federal prison cell at Leavenworth during the early part of the 20th century. His writings can still be found on the internet for those wanting to research Aztlan during the early 20th century. His writings tackle the national oppression that Raza were going through at that time. Both of the Magon brothers were brilliant writers whether they were inside or outside of prison walls. They propagated resistance to oppression within the United States. Being in prison stopped nothing.

Many other contemporary prison writers can be found today scratching out ideas from one concentration kamp or another. Coping with the same repression or torture as the other prisoners while at the same time preserving the experience and thought for the people. Most of these prison theoreticians can be found in the pages of publication like Prison Focus where theoretical resistance emerges and finds comfort. The prison writer must write as surely as one must consume water.

Being a prison writer does not come free from threat from the state. Two of the

above examples were silenced by the state and never left prison alive. Both writers delivering truth from within these bowels of the enemy are not the only writers who conflict and invite lethal repression from the state apparatus. Those outside of prison are not immune to threat.

For the Chicano nation the most glaring example of this repression lies with the assassination of Ruben Salazar, Salazar was a gifted Chicano writer whose work exposing the national oppression of Aztlan helped build public opinion. After moving from his hometown of El Paso, Texas to Northern Califas where he worked as a Journalist, he settled at the *L.A Times* Newspaper working first as a Foreign Correspondent travelling the world. This was a time when the Chicano Movement was in full swing and this helped Salazar to become conscious.

Writing about the struggles the struggles that Chicano@s were going through was what Salazar began to focus on. Despite his earlier attempt at assimilation, the reality was that assimilation was impossible. At one point Salazar even said publicly about Chicano@s situation "We never will melt into that mythical melting pot". It was at this point that Salazar began to write for the people.

Salazar saw that what the Raza were going through at that time was going on unchecked. There was no voice addressing the attacks on Aztlan and he knew that as a Chicano he needed to do this part for his people and he began to write.

Once he wrote about two Mexicanos who were murdered by the pigs. The pigs were indicted, but they warned him that his writings were dangerous. They told him to "stop stirring up the Mexicans" and that "Mexicans are not ready" for his writing. Not long afterwards, during the Chicano Moratorium march against the U.S war on Vietnam on August 29, 1970 Ruben Salazar was killed by the pig, shot with a tear gas gun.

A courageous Brown voice distinguished by the state. His crime being standing up for his people and daring to struggle against the oppressor nation through sharp words which cut deeper than he probably knew. As uncomfortable as it must have been the people always need our perspective explained. We need our press. ●

Part two of Jose's article will appear in the next issue of The Kite newstetter. It was just too long for our first issue.

George Jackson

By Jill Witherspoon Boyer

The newsboy hands us
His death
And smiling leaves us wondering
What to do with it.
We shift from foot to foot
Old discontents,
As the careful comfort in our lives
Flicks off the bullet
That found the soft spot
In his back.
Still some vague thing
About freedom
Makes us nervous to know
When he went.

He falls hard into our memory
Of others gone
For something or nothing.
Righteous rebel, he was tracked to the heights
Of his road
That bent dangerously proud.
Though his spirit rose through
deliberate fires,
He couldn't escape the ones
Who sent the bullet.
But even those who knew their jobs
So well
Only got his flesh,
Because they couldn't strike
The awakened worth of him.

And we, reading his blood,
We jerk on tenterhooks
For fear a trail of broken chains
May lead us.
Servants of safety, we live in our skins.
Our chorus, "He can afford to be free
Who has nothing to lose.
But those who have jewels
Must stay in the grace of thieves."
And so we pull a cover
Over our weapon of will
And yield to forgetfulness of him
With already drying tears.



REFLECTIONS ON CRIME AND CLASS

By Ed Mead

Walk around town in any major city in the U.S. and one can't help but notice the huge and consistently growing number of homeless people living on the streets. This sight is particularly unnerving to me, a modern day Rip Van Winkle. I went into prison back in the mid 1970s, and came out nearly twenty years later to a very different world.

Before I went to prison a lot of people could hitchhike from place to place without a second thought. In one trip I thumbed from Buffalo, New York to San Francisco, and then on up to Seattle, and in the process met a wonderful culture of people who traveled around the country in this way—both men and women hitch hikers.

Back in the day, as a youthful revolutionary, I was prepared to risk imprisonment or worse in an effort to bring about a better world. My peers and I felt the risks were a better alternative than continuing to live under the boot of capitalism's culture of death and global destruction.

Today that culture is far worse. The system considerably more vicious, the nation's citizens more confused, and the level of social atomization has never been greater.

One of the state's primary mechanisms for isolating us from each other is fear. And there is no fear greater than the fear of crime—no domestic segment of bourgeois society is more demonized than the criminal. The alleged offender is no longer a part of "us" but rather suddenly becomes one of "them" (the other upon whom any evil can justly be visited). It is not enough that this demonized person be politically disenfranchised and held behind bars under constitutionally sanctioned conditions of slavery. No, the hapless offender must be also be subjected to endless forms of torture while in prison as well.



B-Tier of the Intensive Management Unit (IMU or Big Red) at Walla Walla penitentiary in 1978.

The first step in getting a better grasp on the crime/fear dynamic is to understand the dialectical processes involved—not the ongoing media-driven hysteria. What constitutes a crime is not some fixed set of proscribed behaviors, but rather changes with time and the class nature of the then existing social order. Both ancient Greece and Rome, for example, were societies based upon the state-supported economic system of slavery. A slave owner during that period would be perfectly within his legal rights to murder one or more of his slaves. He could premeditatedly kill them for punishment or for the mere pleasure of watching them die. The law of the day protected his right to dispose of his property in any way he saw fit—and slaves were property.

Today, getting rich from the surplus value created by your employees is looked upon as one of bourgeois society's highest virtues. In tomorrow's working class social order, on the other hand, that sort of behavior will be criminally repugnant. Just as what we call first-degree premeditated murder was behavior protected by the power of the state under the system of slavery, so too in a future social order acts seen as virtuous today will be looked upon as criminal behavior tomorrow. Indeed, in a future communist society it will rightfully be a crime for one person to materially profit from the labor of another.

Just as the definitions of crime can change with the class basis of the existing social order, so too does it's punishments. Today's capitalist system engenders myriad schemes for separating the working class from its hard-earned money, ranging from telemarketing scams to the usury committed by banks and credit card companies.

Some of these are legal and some are not. When such crimes are punished it is only lightly, usually a fine of some sort. General Motors just paid a fine to the government for knowingly continuing to use a faulty ignition switch that has killed over a hundred people. No prison for them, only a very modest fine.

The same is true for punishments against corporations and wealthy individuals. Indeed, a rich person has never been executed in all of American history. Yet in all class societies up until now, the crimes of the poor are punished far more harshly. This disparity in punishment is applied with a vengeance during periods of social instability.

In feudal England it became a crime punishable by death to commit such petty offenses as killing a rabbit on private land, chopping down a tree on a public lane, or picking a pocket. These draconian punishments have never worked. History records groups of pick pockets gleefully plying their trade on crowds gathered to watch the hanging of a fellow pick pocket.

When General Licinius Crassus impaled the heads of Spartacus and thousands of rebellious followers on spikes along the road to Rome, his doing so did not save the system of slavery or the Roman Empire that lived off it. Nor did murdering hapless pick pockets save the British monarchy from the onslaught of capitalist productive relations.

Similarly, the adoption of harsh three-strikes legislation, the gutting of constitutional protections, and the ongoing expansion of the death penalty etc., will not save the moribund system of international capitalism. Yet if history is any teacher, we can expect ever harsher punishments and still fewer legal safeguards for accused criminals or others who seek to implement a radical transformation of existing class relations.

While the ruling class makes good use of the existence of crime (by keeping people isolated by fear from each other), they do not want the presence of crime any more than we do. Nobody *wants* crime. Still, in a social order in which one-half of one percent own more than ninety percent of the nation's property, resources, and productive capacity (not to mention control of the means of education and information), it is understandable that those who have the least will take some stumbling steps to restore a more natural balance of the wealth.

The rich fully understand that crime is a force, not unlike that of electricity or running water, and as such it will follow the path of least resistance. It even has a natural direction too—against property (ninety percent of all crimes are against property).

Through the mechanism of increased resistance required to attack their property interests, the ruling class effectively channels the force of crime back on to the poor. The rich live in remote, gated communities; their banks have armed guards, sophisticated alarm systems, and are protected by the jurisdiction of the federal courts and the investigative techniques of the F.B.I.

Since crime tends to follow the course of least resistance, the social effect of these

and a growing security measures is to redirect the force of crime back on to the poor. Hence the dramatic increase in both the level and intensity of poor-on-poor crime.

And with the advent of ever less expensive and more available surveillance mechanisms and alarm systems, the force of crime is being steadily pushed further and further into our poorest minority communities. We can expect this trend to continue until every home (or car) that can afford it will be an electronic fortress.

How are progressives to respond to this situation? A starting point would be to organize our communities so as to redirect the force of crime back up against those elements responsible for its development—the rich. We cannot today implement the economically just society necessary for the ultimate elimination of crime. Without that foundation, without control of the means of information and education, without control of the means of production, we can only work to redirect the force of crime back up against those who created the conditions for its development.

The political consciousness of the under-culture needs to be raised to a point that makes preying on the poor not cool or even dangerous for those confused victims of capitalism who steal from or otherwise victimize their impoverished neighbors. The message must be: “Rather than ripping off that old woman for her monthly sustenance check, take your needs to those who can better afford to pay.”

Prisoners should especially be involved in this process. Their lack of class-consciousness is clearly reflected by the fact that there is currently no stigma attached if you are in prison for cannibalizing your own community. There is one, however, for being a rapist or child molester. This is wrong. There should be no stigma on the basis of one's crime. When you do that you are engaging in extra judicial punishment. We all know that punishment is ineffective and wrong. It is what the state advocates. By stigmatizing or otherwise punishing your peers you are unwittingly furthering the interests of the state. That said, we should cast a suspicious eye on those who prey on the weak and the poor. We must be their defenders, not their oppressors.

Instead, those who prey on their own class should be made a part of study groups so that they can become class conscious. Rapists must organize other rapists so they too can study feminist literature and become able to internalize class and gender

politics—so they too can become a part of the solution.

On the outside we can start laying the foundation for dual power by policing our communities (without collaboration with the state's apparatus of repression). Taking control of our neighborhoods is an important part of increasing the resistance that will ultimately direct crime back up against the rich.

When the movement finally develops again, class-conscious ex-convicts would take leadership in this community protection process. And those still on the inside would hold study groups for their peers on issues of class, race, and the various manifestations of sexism. Although we can't yet eliminate crime, we can at least start the process of making it more class conscious.

Maybe one day I will be able to walk down the street and smile and say hello to the person walking his dog, and to give a warm greeting and a pat on the head to those children who need a whole community to love them. Maybe I can stick out my thumb and meet many new friends as I travel the land.

While a revolution is necessary, right now I would be happy to get back to the place where society's head was at in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Of course, back then I thought things were so bad that I risked death and a life of imprisonment to try and overthrow the system. ●

THE PRICE OF JUSTICE

By Jeffrey R. Mckee #882819

I have been incarcerated since 2003. I have been housed at five different Washington State institutions and two private prisons. Anyone who knows me understands that I am not shy in challenging the Department and its policies. I also have advocated for years that we prisoners unite in a peaceful protest and work stoppage to improve our conditions of existence.

Every time I mention the notion of a work stoppage or lay-in to other prisoners they say “that will never happen here in Washington State.” Well, on April 1st of 2018, our comrades at Walla Walla peacefully went on a hunger strike in protest of the horrible tasting and non-nutritional meals being served. The hunger strike last until April 9th, 2018, when the “Department [DOC] agreed to work with the inmates.”

What change will be made is uncertain,

but what is certain is that when this was covered in the media it was noted that the inmates protested peacefully. The public is more apt to listen to us prisoners when we organize in a peaceful manner and speak out against the oppression we are forced to live under.

So the next time you hear me preach that we should all lay-in for a month of protest of a specific rule or practice. Instead of saying, “that will never work” say, I agree and I am going to get my friends to join in also. United in peaceful, legal (it is our right to protest injustice) we can bring about constructive change. Individually we can accomplish nothing. ●

[**Editor's Note:** National prison leaders have called for a nation-wide work strike starting on George Jackson day (August 21st) and ending on Attica Day (September 9th). A similar call went out last year and something like seventeen state prison systems participated in peaceful work strikes. The most active prisoners were in the South and East. Washington and Oregon were no-shows, yet again.

The primary issues behind the national strike were the provision of the Thirteenth Amendment's legitimization of slavery for those convicted of a crime and the right to vote for all prisoners. The shot callers added that each state should also list their own issues and complaints. But the purpose of the strike is to educate the public to the fact that there are 2.2 million slaves of the state in America, and that there is no rational basis for slavery or disenfranchisement in today's United States. Through peaceful protest and struggle people successfully worked to legalize marijuana in Washington. Through peaceful protest and struggle people were able to win the right to gay marriage. Now it is our turn. The time is right. These are not revolutionary demands, they are merely bourgeois democratic demands, reformist demands that can be won with long-term peaceful protests. And here, once again, the issue of peaceful activities must be emphasized.

Note that the struggle to amend or abolish the Thirteenth Amendment is not something that can be accomplished by jailhouse lawyers utilizing the bourgeois courts. The judicial system can only interpret the constitution, they cannot amend or otherwise change it. In order to win this fundamental chance prisoners, their family members, ex-convicts, etc. must mount a nation-wide political struggle.]

OPINIONS COUNT

Introduction: On April 15, a rebellion erupted at South Carolina's Lee Correctional Institution, a maximum-security prison, where 44 officers were guarding 1,583 prisoners. A quarter of all prison jobs in the state are unfilled.

Seven prisoners died – Eddie Casey Jay Gaskins, Joshua Swwin Jenkins, Michael Milledge, Cornelius Quantal McClary, Damonte Marquez Rivera, Raymond Angelo Scott and Corey Scott – and 22 were seriously injured. Ironically, this is being called the deadliest prison violence in a quarter century, since the Lucasville Uprising on April 11-21, 1993. Lucasville survivors on death row are currently on hunger strike.

In an op-ed to the Charlotte Observer, Isaac Bailey, a member of the Observer Editorial Board, wrote what he'd learned from his brother, a long time prisoner at Lee: "Officials say the riot was caused by a turf war over cell phones and other contraband. But James had been detailing to me for more than a year the more likely culprit: deteriorating conditions at Lee. The staffing levels are so low, officers don't make required rounds. That left prisoners inside their cells longer each day. Some weeks, they got to shower twice; other times they went without showers for up to nine days. Prisoners knew officers would not come to the rescue if they were attacked – which provided a major incentive to join gangs as a means of self-preservation.

"Productive programs that can stimulate prisoners' minds and bodies – a real public service, given that most prisoners are eventually freed – have been curtailed. Some prisoners have gone for up to a year without sneakers. There has been a long-term water outage in part of the prison, according to another prisoner I spoke with. Those small indignities add up, yet some officials feign surprise when those treated inhumanely behave in inhumane ways.

"After every incident, prisoners are locked down longer, which leads to more resentment and unrest and more violence, a vicious cycle."

ABC reports that prisoners cannot even escape the violence by locking themselves in their cells. "ALL of the doors to the cells are broken," a prisoner wrote.

A quarrel over contraband having been blamed for sparking the rebellion, on April 18, 14 former guards, a nurse, a groundskeeper and service workers were indicted

for taking bribes, wire fraud and smuggling cellphones and cocaine, methamphetamine, marijuana and alcohol into prisons from April 2015 to December 2017.

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.

Media inquiries should be directed to prisonstrikesmedia@gmail.com. ●

Source: <http://sfbayview.com/2018/04/south-carolina-freedom-fighters-call-for-national-prisoners-strike-aug-21-sept-9-2018/>

DISOBEYING AN ORDER CAN LAND YOU IN THE 'SHU'

By TCR Staff

The solitary housing unit (SHU) was created to discipline the most violent offenders in prison and separate them from the community, but who is really sitting in the SHU?

According to a new study by the Vera Institute of Justice, most individuals in solitary confinement are there for low-level, nonviolent offenses such as disobeying a correction officer.

The study, which collected data from restricted housing units in Nebraska, Oregon, North Carolina, New York City, and Middlesex County, NJ found that low level offenders could be in solitary confinement for a few days or a few months.

In Nebraska, "disobeying an order" accounted for 28 percent of such sentences. In North Carolina, none of the top 10 infractions resulting in disciplinary segregation were among the most serious charges, as determined by the Department of Public Safety.

And in Oregon, 58 percent of disciplinary segregation sentences were for nonviolent infractions.

Consequently, since Vera conducted these analyses, the North Carolina Department of Public Safety has significantly altered its policies governing disciplinary practices, and the Nebraska Department of Correctional Services has ended its use of disciplinary segregation altogether, the study said.

Currently, there are around 80,000 to 100,000 prisoners in segregated housing units around the nation that use isolation and deprivation to discipline inmates. Such punishment has been widely criticized by advocates as inhumane and abusive.

Moreover, the study found that infrequent reviews and the lack of set release dates and clear pathways out of administrative segregation led to long stays in the SHU.

For example, in North Carolina, more than 1,200 people were being held indefinitely in segregation, waiting for their cases to be reviewed by a staff member or committee and they were judged ready to return to the general population.

However, these reviews were infrequently conducted, the study found.

In Oregon, people who were incarcerated typically spent between 60 and 150

days (approximately two to five months) in the Intensive Management Unit—a form of administrative segregation—before their first review.

Long stays in isolation can have devastating effects on incarcerated individual's mental health, making it even more difficult to return to their community upon release, noted the study.

Men of color and those with mental health problems were the most likely populations to be sitting in solitary confinement.

In Nebraska prisons, a combined group of Asian Americans, Pacific Islanders, Latinos, and Native Americans had the highest rates of contact with restrictive housing, with 17 percent in the most-restrictive settings as compared to 9 percent of white people. In Oregon, people of color made up 26 percent of the total incarcerated population but 34 percent of those in restrictive housing.

Women and older individuals were less likely to spend time in the SHU, the study also found.

While making changes in correctional facilities can be a slow, challenging process, the study noted, there are still revisions that need to be made, the Vera Institute concluded.

The recommendations include:

1. Reduce the flow of people into various types of restrictive housing.
2. Exclude certain vulnerable groups from restrictive housing.
3. Shorten the length of time people spend in restrictive housing.
4. Improve conditions in restrictive housing.
5. Assist people in transitioning to a facility's general population—and whenever possible, avoid releasing them from restrictive housing to the community.

See also: *Survivors of Solitary Still Haunted by Memories:*

<https://thecrimereport.org/2018/04/30/survivors-of-solitary-still-haunted-by-memories/> •

A full copy of the report can be found on the Internet at:

https://storage.googleapis.com/vera-web-assets/downloads/Publications/rethinking-restrictive-housing/legacy_downloads/rethinking-restrictive-housing-report.pdf

PROBLEM SOLVING MASS INCARCERATION

The focus on solving the problem(s) of mass incarceration will depend on convict/prisoner involvement.

I am a convict and an ex-prisoner. I served more than 40 years of my life behind bars. In 1969 at the age of 33 years I became an activist serving time at the Washington State Penitentiary at Walla Walla. One of my accomplishments as an activist was to establish the first prisoner chapter of the Black Panther Party for Self Defense. But more important was my involvement in creating an underground prisoner publication called "*The Bomb*." It was a means all of us convicts inside of prison had to communicate with each other on common grievances and discuss problem solving those issues. The result was a dramatic change in the conditions of prisons in the State of Washington.

"Communication is a Human Right."

This in essence was the purpose of *The Bomb*. The U.S. Supreme Court has held that when seeking the protections of the provisions the federal and state constitutions, the constitution offering the greatest protection is the controlling law. We convicts hold that "our" constitutional provision, communication is a human right trumps all federal and state provision of the right of freedom of the press.

The communications we have on the streets, on yard, in the mess hall, on the tiers and in cells are expressions of that right. We of *The Kite* want to be a part of that expression. Us convicts on the streets want to join in that communication with you.

Mark Cook, USP 20025-148



On Jailhouse Lawyers

"...jailhouse lawyers often unwittingly serve the interests of the state by propagating the illusion of 'justice' and 'equity' in a system devoted to neither." They create "illusions of legal options as pathways to both individual and collective liberation."

*Mumia Abu-Jamal,
JAILHOUSE LAWYERS: Prisoners
Defending Prisoners v. The U.S.A.*

**I am no longer accepting
the things I cannot change,**



**I am changing the things I
cannot accept.**

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