

ROCK

★ Working to Extend Democracy to All ★

★ Volume 1, Number 11 ★

★ November 2012 ★

CALIFORNIA AUTHORITIES URGED TO END SHOCKING CONDITIONS IN PRISON ISOLATION UNITS

The US state of California must make substantial changes to their prison isolation units and halt the inhuman suffering of thousands of prisoners, Amnesty International said in a new report out today.

“The Edge of Endurance: Conditions in California’s Security Housing Units,” is based on exclusive access gained by Amnesty International to isolation units in California and explores the conditions of confinement endured by more than 3,000 prisoners -- including 78 who have spent in excess of two decades in isolation.

Prisoners in isolation are confined to at least 22 and a half hours a day in cells measuring fewer than eight square meters. In Pelican Bay State Prison, over 1,000 inmates are confined alone in windowless cells with poor access to natural light. Exercise is limited to an hour and a half a

day, alone in a bare, concrete yard with 20 foot high walls with only a patch of sky visible through a partially meshed plastic roof.

Prisoners in isolation don’t have access to work, rehabilitation programs or group activities on any kind.

They are also prevented from any contact with the outside world, consultations with medical staff take place behind barriers and visits from family or lawyers take place behind a glass screen. Prisoners are not entitled to regular telephone contact with relatives.

“The conditions and length of imprisonment in California’s isolation units are simply shocking,” said Angela Wright, US Researcher at Amnesty International who visited a number of prisons in the state.

“To deprive prisoners in a segregated environment of natural light, adequate exercise or meaningful human contact is unnecessarily punitive and unjustifiable in all circumstances. Access to natural light and exercise are basic needs, essential for physical and mental health.”

According to figures provided by the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation in 2011, more than 500 prisoners have spent ten or more years in isolation, more than 200 had spent over 15 years and 78 in excess of 20 years.

Even though isolation is intended for extreme cases, many prisoners who end up in such units have mental illness or behavioral problems and have sometimes been confined for repeated, relatively minor rule infractions and disruptive behavior. Over 2,000 prisoners are being held in isolation after being “validated” as members or associates of prison gangs.

One prisoner, who had been in an isolation unit for 22 years, told two Amnesty In-

ternational delegates during a visit to Pelican Bay that they were the first outsiders he had seen in the cell block for years.

An inmate of Mexican origin wrote in December 2011 that he had not had visits from his elderly parents since he was sent to an isolation unit in Pelican Bay in 1999 as they were too frail to travel the distance. For several years he applied on grounds of hardship for a transfer to a prison nearer to his home, but was told by the classification committee that “they might consider my transfer if I would debrief” (i.e. provide information about other gang members).

“In November 2009 my mom passed away, I never got to see her again, the last time I talked to her was in 1999,” he said.

“We fully recognize the challenges faced by prison administrators in dealing with prison gangs and recognize that it may sometimes be necessary to segregate prisoners for disciplinary or security purposes,” said Angela Wright.

“However, current conditions of isolation are extremely severe and too widely used. Segregation should be imposed only in exceptional circumstances and for as short a period as possible.”

Prisoners in isolation units in Pelican Bay have reported a range of physical problems resulting from, or exacerbated by, their conditions of confinement.

The severe negative psychological consequences of isolation are reflected in data from various jurisdictions showing that suicides occur more frequently in isolation units than in the general prison population. In California, over a five year period from 2006 to 2010, the number of prison suicides averaged 34 a year with 42% occurring in administrative segregation or isolation units.

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Studies have found that negative effects from prolonged isolation can continue long after release; and the lack of pre-release or transitional programming for inmates who may have spent years, or decades in isolation before being released directly back on to the street makes successful reintegration into society that much harder.

“Recent reform proposals do not go far enough to address Amnesty International’s many serious concerns with California’s long term isolation units; if further changes, such as those proposed in detail in our report, are not incorporated into these reforms, California would still fall short of international law and standards for humane treatment of prisoners and the prohibition of torture and other ill-treatment,” said Angela Wright.

Amnesty International is urging authorities in California to:

- Limit the use of isolation units so that it is imposed only as a last resort in the case of prisoners whose behavior constitutes a severe and ongoing threat to the safety of others.
- Improve conditions for all prisoners held in isolation units, including better exercise provision and an opportunity for more human contact for prisoners, even at the most restrictive custody levels.
- Allow prisoners in isolation units to make regular phone calls to their families.
- Reduce the length of the Step Down Program and providing meaningful access to programs where prisoners have an opportunity for some group contact and interaction with others at an earlier stage.
- Immediate removal from isolation of prisoners who have already spent years in those units. ■

*Amnesty International,
27 September 2012*



HUNGER STRIKE CONTINUES AT CORCORAN

A rolling hunger strike that has moved through three California prisons had dwindled by Wednesday to 69 inmates, officials said.

The fasting began among some 500 inmates Oct. 10 at the state’s maximum security Pelican Bay State Prison near Oregon and at the California Correctional Institution at Tehachapi, north of Los Angeles. By Friday, Pelican Bay inmates had resumed eating. Those in segregated housing units at Tehachapi continued to refuse prison-prepared meals until Wednesday, when they resumed eating, California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation spokeswoman Terry Thornton said.

However, 69 inmates continued what is now a four-day fast at Corcoran State Prison.

Corrections officials said the inmates are protesting new gang control policies the state intends to put into place, defining when and how inmates suspected of gang membership are to be assigned to long-term segregation units away from the main population.

Conditions within those security housing units and the length of time inmates are held that way are the subject of a critical Amnesty International report and a subject of litigation. California has at least 78 inmates who have spent more than two decades in the tightly cloistered cells. ■

Los Angeles Times, October 17, 2012

TWO PRISONS NOW REPORT HUNGER STRIKES OVER GANG POLICY

A hunger strike over new prison gang policies has spread to a second institution, involving more than 200 inmates.

By Tuesday, inmates were refusing food at prisons near Tehachapi and Corcoran, part of a protest that began Oct. 10. Corrections officials said many of the striking inmates are objecting to new policies in how gang members are identified for placement in special segregated units, and under what

conditions they may be released back into the main population.

“They believe it widens the scope,” said Kelly Harrington, associate director of high security for the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation.

The new policies, currently under review, create a four-year process for alleged gang members to return to the general population, and spell out circumstances under which prison officials can place inmates into segregation. Harrington said the regulations will be circulated among wardens “in the next week” but are not yet to be implemented.

Currently inmates must refrain from gang-related activity for six years before they may be released from segregated housing. The new policy creates a four-year “step down” program that grants inmates additional access to exercise, food and outside communication if they remain “gang-free.”

The hunger strike began seven days ago at California Correctional Institution in Tehachapi, where 135 inmates Tuesday continued to refuse food, down from an initial 300. Corrections officials on Tuesday said an additional 72 inmates at Corcoran State Prison were now also on a hunger strike, having refused nine or more consecutive meals. ■

Los Angeles Times, October 16, 2012

STUDENTS HOLD DEMONSTRATION TO PROTEST SOLITARY CONFINEMENT CONDITIONS

Demonstrators set up a mock jail cell on Sproul Plaza on Wednesday to protest inhumane treatment of prisoners in California, an issue officials from the state Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation say is much more complicated than the demonstration let on.

Passers-by were invited to step inside a cell, which protesters said aimed to imitate the quarters prisoners in solitary confinement have to live in.

UC Berkeley junior Jason Webber, who helped facilitate the protest, said that over a long period of time, solitary confinement amounts to torture.

"It goes above and beyond what you need to do to someone, regardless of what their crime is," Webber said.

Jerry Elster, who spent five years in solitary confinement and spoke at the protest, equated the experience to sitting in a closet or bathroom for 23 hours a day.

"The system is locking people up, depriving them of certain human rights," Elster said. "It's more than deplorable — it's unconstitutional."

Terry Thornton, deputy press secretary for the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation, said conditions in California cells are different from what the demonstration presented. Some prisoners have access to radios, televisions, libraries and educational programs, she said.

Azadeh Zohrabi, a UC Hastings College of the Law alumna who spoke at the protest, said prisoners can be sent to solitary confinement based on determinate or indeterminate sentences. Indeterminate sentences include a process of "validation," where people can be put in solitary confinement for perceived gang-related activity, she said.

"Most people in solitary confinement haven't actually engaged in any behavior that warrants the situation," Zohrabi said. "The process is arbitrary and broad."

Zohrabi said she heard a story of a letter being returned to family members instead of being delivered to a prisoner because it included the Spanish word for sun, "sol," and that was deemed gang-related. She said she had also heard that another prisoner was not able to send a letter to his uncle because he called him "Tio," the Spanish word for uncle.

Thornton said the validation process is how law enforcement officials work to disrupt gang activity in prisons. A new system is currently being reviewed by the California Office of Administrative Law, and wardens are being sent information on changes this month.

"The issue of dealing with gangs is an issue this department has been grappling with for decades," Thornton said. "It's an investigation process."

UC Berkeley senior Sam Miyazaki, who was there for the protest and went into the cell, said before the demonstration, she did not know anything about any of the issues being discussed.

"It's freaking sad," Miyazaki said. ■

*Shannon Carroll, The Daily Californian
October 18, 2012*

SPEECH MUST BE FREE

A shoutout of solidarity and respect to all who continue to resist the CDCR, OCS/IGI illegal policies and practices via our collective efforts on the inside and outside of these prison walls! For the past few months I've read articles in the *Bay View*, the *Rock*, and *PHSS News* about CDCR/IGI staff punishing people who talk about non-violent, peaceful protest activities—such as hunger strike/work strike (e.g., responding to such speech with punitive action in the form of confiscating incoming and outgoing mail, issuing serious rule violation reports, cancelling visits in the middle of the visit, etc.).

I'm not a lawyer, but I believe such acts of suppression are a clear violation of one's First Amendment free speech rights! An example of legal support for this position is the Ninth Circuit's ruling in *McCoy v. Steward*, 2002, D.J. DAR 2173, wherein the court held "...Former gang member's conviction for speaking to other gang members violated the First Amendment" (he was alleged to have advised some Arizona gang affiliates about various ways to structure their gang based on his gang experience in California. The basis for the court's ruling was that McCoy's conviction was unconstitutional because, at worst, his words to the gang were abstract advocacy of lawlessness not directed to inciting imminent lawless action. Thus, they were protected under *Brandenburg v. Ohio*, 395 U.S. 444 (1969) and its progeny.

In *Brandenburg*, its seminal advocacy case, the Supreme Court held that the "mere abstract teaching" of "the moral propriety or even moral necessity for a resort to force and violence" is protected by the First Amendment unless such speech is "directed to inciting or producing imminent lawless action and is likely to incite or produce such action." 395 U.S. 444-448 (1969). Under *Brandenburg* timing is crucial, because speech must incite imminent lawless action to be constitutionally prosecutable. Thus, several years later, in *Hess v. Indiana*, the Court made explicit what was implicit in *Brandenburg*: a state cannot constitutionally sanction "advocacy of illegal action at some indefinite future time." 414 U.S. 105, at 108 (1973).

The above principles apply to the subject matter at issue because CDCR, *et al.*, have sought to criminalize and punitively sanc-

tion people for what amounts to "abstract advocacy" regarding non-violent, peaceful protest types of activity that does not present an imminent threat to safety or security. Also notable is the California Appellate Court's implicit recognition of a mentally competent prisoner's right to peacefully protest issues of personal/moral importance to the individual. See: *In re Conservatorship of Burton*, 170 Cal. App. 4th 1016 (2009).

These can be further researched, expanded upon, and used to challenge CDCR's ongoing efforts to suppress our speech—so they can keep us silent while they continue to torture and oppress us under the guise of their "worst of the worst" propaganda. Their ability to do so depends upon our complacent cooperation!

Onward in Struggle and Solidarity ■

Todd Ashker, October 7, 2012

OPPOSITION TO ELEMENTS OF PROPOSED SECURITY STG THREAT GROUP POLICY

Description:

Roles and Responsibilities:

The proposed policy outlines the official roles and the responsibilities involved in the overall scheme but lacks an accountability element. One of the biggest problems with the current policy is the impunity with which officials violate, misapply, or abdicate their duties. An accountability stipulation with, perhaps, consequential sanctions for failure to uphold the respective office duty would go a long way to curb the widespread impunity that, in practice, renders any intended "checks and balances" mechanism useless (note, for example, the OCS's perfunctory rubber stamping of unsupporting or poorly articulated source items used in validations).

Certification Process:

Policy is overbroad. The department knows that 99% of prison population is made up of street-gang affiliates. Under proposed certification procedure and criteria all such groups are susceptible to STG certification. Even when they (the groups) do not operate within CDCR's jurisdiction, ie: do not pose a threat to the safety and

security of the department's multiple institutions (note: there are 5000+ street gangs in LA County alone).

Validation Process:

This element or aspect of the policy is ambiguous. That is, it doesn't make clear if a validation requires an automatic segregation of SHU placement. And, in the event that it does, then, it conflicts with the department's stated intent to adopt the new paradigm of focusing on behavior since under this policy one can be validated for matters having nothing to do with "behavior." Plus, the procedure subjects individuals to interrogation that violates the 5th amendment as requires answering questions that can incriminate which we oppose.

Security Threat Group Management Unit Housing Program:

The policy prohibits visits at several of the phases as well as strips individuals of their property in what can only be viewed as punishment for seeking to get out of the SHU and stay disciplinary free.

Most importantly, it gives CDCR officials more range to do as they've been doing...falsify, manipulate, and fabricate source items used to validate "anyone" which is the current reason why they refuse to relinquish to the court discovery requests.

For one to enter a STG, he/she would be admitting to be an associate. What most of us have contended from day one. We object to these draconian measures.

"Stick to our plan" ■

Derrick (Chimchim) Sims, PBSP

ONCE HOSTILITIES HAVE ENDED

I recently read about the "agreement to end hostilities" and seen this as an essential step forward for prisoners but a step that will include many more steps in the future if prisoners are to truly take back our humanity, not just in California but in prisons across America. Although I support the original five demands and will continue to do so along with any future demands for justice, I felt the need to add to the dialogue and perhaps bring some ideas to the scene.

What I noticed from the five demands and many other proposals being kicked around is the absence of the very core of our oppression—the SHU itself. What we have learned since the initial strike was that many civil rights groups and people around the world see the SHU itself as torture, all

or most of what is being asked for, ie: contact visits, phone calls, cellies, etc. can be granted were it not for SHU. Even things like validation and debriefing, etc. become easier to combat when the SHU is out of the picture so it is the SHU itself that becomes the core of our oppression in regards to the movement in general and the current struggles we are facing in in the nation's SHUs and Ad-Seg units.

This is why any proposals should have at the forefront the demand to close the SHU's! How can we talk of justice or prisoner rights *without* calling for an end to housing prisoners for *any* reason in these concentration camps? It's like saying "you can water board me but can we listen to a better radio station while you do it?" No other country is doing what America does with the SHU on this scale but it is ultimately up to us to steer the prison movement on a real path of transformation or to limit any changes to what amount to mild reforms.

Many struggles throughout history that dealt with prisons gained far more than what has currently been proposed in our situation. A couple of situations that quickly come to mind are the Puerto Rican revolutionary group Macheteros who were arrested in the 1960's for acts against America in their quest for independence. It came out via Freedom of Information Act years later that the national security advisor was on record saying the Macheteros should be released because of the protests and world support and how these protests do not look good for America in the eyes of the world. This is on record and the Macheteros were released, they were *released* from prison and linked to bombings and other acts against the US government.

Another group of prisoners were the Red Army Faction of Germany who were in prison for acts against the government, bombings, cop killings, murders of politicians, etc., and when this group was arrested they were housed in a specially constructed area of the prison—kinda like the short corridor—and were in solitary confinement and not allowed to come in *any* contact with any other prisoners but through hunger strikes and supporters out in society raising awareness about their treatment they were finally granted yard time with each other and better treatment after a year or two of constant struggle.

My main thrust here is that is those were assassinating government officials, judges, etc., in an attempt to overthrow the govern-

ment were able to overturn the isolation and draconian treatment, surely we can as well!

In beginning to grapple with our oppression and find the best method of resistance we must first understand the origins of our oppression. One cannot move forward with a correct game plan without knowing ones opponent. When a boxer is about to fight a formidable opponent what does he/she do? Well, they watch the videos of the opponent's fights in order to understand the opponent's strengths and weaknesses, thus preparing oneself for a proper offensive. We must also do our homework in this current anti-SHU struggle, things like where the SHU came from, why it is used so much in America—more so than other countries, who controls such a system? *We must* identify our opponent if we want to move forward. We know the SHU and all prisons are a part of the "state" apparatus, but who controls the state? The ruling class is surely not including the people (the poor people), it is the rich who run things, these rich or capitalists have developed into what Lenin defined as "Imperialism" which is simply capitalism on steroids, it's economic exploitation on a global scale.

So the state and thus prisons are run according to what is in the interest of the ruling class. Prisoners in general are not profitable to this ruling class as most prisoners derive from what Lenin defined as the lumpen proletariat, which is basically the underclass or can better be defined in America as simple the "lumpen", which are prisoners, the unemployed, those caught up in crime, etc. Most lumpen are just taking up space and not helping the wheels turn in the economy but more importantly, lumpen are a potential revolutionary force as this is the natural order of repression inviting resistance, whenever one is being smothered the natural reaction is to struggle to breathe. Our acts of resistance in the hunger strikes clearly proved this to be true, there are many phenomenon that occur that are long held communist principles that may be practiced today by many prisoners without even knowing their origins. We must use these tools to gain victory in our current situation, one such tool is the philosophy of historical materialism, which is used to transform things in the material world. It does this by understanding historical events and processes which created the specific reality which gave rise to our current struggle. In order to change or transform our torture condition in SHU we

would first have to understand the process of what brought the SHU itself into being. When we understand that it was the state and ultimately the ruling class which created the means to throw away vast swaths of the population and smother any embers of resistance, then we'll know we can't change things simply by picketing around a prison or filing a lawsuit. This is because we are up against something more sinister than simple "tough laws."

Marxism is a method, not a dogma. It is fluid and continues to find new responses in its interactions with the material world, so it will continue to be applied to different phenomenon. Although asking the state for changes is cool and must be done, the more crucial change must come from within one's own approach to our oppression. We are deprived of so much but the most vital opportunities are low hanging fruit, these being opportunities in the theoretical realm.

The task we have ahead of all of us held in U.S. prisons is an uphill battle which is in sync—even if we don't realize it—with many other struggles aimed at the U.S. empire, not just in America but globally. We should aim to unmask the ruling class' brutal dictatorship and deny it the ability to operate cloaked in secrecy. Let's strip it bare and display its most grotesque parts of society. In doing this let every dungeon where conditions have peaked to intolerable proportions raise the banner of resistance in regard to material conditions. In this way we will expose the contradictions in "American democracy" while obtaining small gains to our conditions. People are social animals. Our entire existence is based on interaction with others, our senses demand this. When all sensory input is deprived it works against our very being; it destroys us, dehumanizes us.

Lastly, although I would of course always like to hear editors of publication ramble on about what some have referred to as "commie rhetoric", I would much rather hear a prisoner's perspective on communist principles or how they apply to the prison movement in general or the anti-SHU struggle in particular. Yet one cannot discuss "prisoner rights" without discussion prisoner oppression (capitalism). Today's society puts profit ahead of the people as far as education, food, land, etc., and this crime leads to the next natural step, which is finding an alternative society where prisons and SHUs are not used as concentration camps. The only society

that would really change that is a socialist system—to deny this is to deny history. ■

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[Ed's Note: This was originally a six page article that I had to edit for length.

Secondly, the reader should keep in mind that socialism in the U.S.S.R. and China took place in backwards nations, lacking the productive capacity to meet the people's needs, and without traditions of democracy. Socialism in this country would look much different, in that there would be economic justice and a meaningful extension of democracy. Right now only the rich enjoy real democracy.]

PROGRESS IN GEORGIA

Due to our efforts of numerous Letters, Protest, Marches, and lawsuits against the wardens and officials of the Georgia Department of Corrections, regarding its Special Management Unit. The Georgia Department of Corrections has finally seen the light and implemented new Policies and Procedures pertaining to SMU.

We were notified today that in spite of the GA. D.O.C. not meeting with us and the community to resolve constitutional issues brought up by inmates and concerned citizens. The Dept. of Corrections has implemented one of the most detailed policies and procedures ever for SMU. These new policies replace the old policies, which did not fully and explicitly protect the constitutional rights of SMU inmates.

The Inhumane, unconstitutional conduct of DOC officials is slowly being exposed. All of our efforts regarding protest, lawsuits, letters, and inquiries to Dept. of Justice, G.B.I. and office of the Attorney General are starting to pay off in the form of concrete criteria that help protect inmates from being treated inhumanely.

Operating a Special Management Unit with scant policies for decades essentially permitted prison official to arbitrarily and unjustifiably violate the human rights of Georgia prisoners, for decades.

The new SMU policy comes not even two weeks after T.O.P.S. recent lawsuit that finally placed the DOC in a position where it had to identify policies and procedures that protect constitutional rights of SMU

inmates. Now the DOC has established a new comprehensive policy that is a great step forward towards holding officials accountable for their conduct towards inmates being placed in SMU-- as many of you know, the former policies permitted inmates to be placed in SMU without any disciplinary infraction or charge officially brought against that inmate and then be held in SMU without any due process, for year!

The Fight is not over. The new SMU policy has problems as to be expected. For example,

The review board that decides who is being placed and kept in what the DOC describes as the most restrictive prison environment within the department has no one from the community or anyone other than D.O.C. We need more oversight than that.

Also, we need to ensure that those currently being held wrongfully in SMU are not kept there. ■

Pastor Kenneth Glasgow

Quote Box

"The only security of all is in a free press. The force of public opinion cannot be resisted when permitted freely to be expressed. The agitation it produces must be submitted to. It is necessary, to keep the waters pure."

Thomas Jefferson to Lafayette, 1823

"The ruling class has the schools and press under its thumb. This enables it to sway the emotions of the masses."

Albert Einstein - (1879-1955)

"The duty of a patriot is to protect his country from its government."

Thomas Paine

"The vices of the rich and great are mistaken for error; and those of the poor and lowly, for crimes."

Marguerite Gardiner;

Countess of Blessington (1789-1849)

"It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but their social existence that determines their consciousness."

Karl Marx

"Search for the truth is the noblest occupation of man; its publication is a duty."

Anne Louise Germaine de Stael

CRIMINOLOGIST FINDS THAT DECLINE IN ALCOHOL CONSUMPTION IS MOST RESPONSIBLE FOR DECREASING CRIME RATE

Contrary to what police, politicians and the public believe about the effectiveness of California's three-strikes law, research by a University of California, Riverside criminologist has found that the get-tough-on-criminals policy voters approved in 1994 has done nothing to reduce the crime rate.

In a rigorous analysis of crime in California and the nation, sociology professor Robert Nash Parker determined that crime has been decreasing at about the same rate in every state for 20 years, regardless of whether three-strikes policies are in place or not.

Parker's findings appear in the paper "Why California's 'Three Strikes' Fails as Crime and Economic Policy, and What to Do," published recently in the California Journal of Politics and Policy. The online journal publishes cutting-edge research on national, state and local government, electoral politics, and public policy formation and implementation.

California's three-strikes law imposes a minimum sentence of 25 years to life on the third felony conviction for offenders with prior serious or violent felony convictions. Approximately 23,000 individuals have been incarcerated under three strikes. Proposition 36, on the Nov. 6 ballot, would impose the life sentence only when the new felony conviction is serious or violent.

"There is not a single shred of scientific evidence, research or data to show that three strikes caused a 100 percent decline in violence in California or elsewhere in the last 20 years," Parker said, adding that the downward trend began two years before the California law was enacted. ■

Source: ucrtoday.ucr.edu/9405

ACLU EXPOSES SOLITARY CONFINEMENT IN NY STATE PRISONS

"I feel like the walls are closing in on me. I get suicidal." — Stephan, a prisoner living in extreme isolation in New York.

Imagine living 23 hours a day locked in a cell the size of a parking spot. You are denied all meaningful human contact and mental stimulation. Recreation amounts to an hour alone in an empty pen. At the drop of a hat, basic necessities like food, exercise and showers are taken away. You receive no educational classes, vocational training or other programming.

This is the cruel reality for the thousands of people subjected to extreme isolation every year. In 2011, the Department of Corrections and Community Supervision (DOCCS) issued more than 13,500 extreme isolation sentences. Prisoners in extreme isolation endure psychological, emotional and physical torment that has no place in a decent society. Nearly 2,000 people in New York are released directly from extreme isolation to the streets each year.

Even the state's top prison official admits that New York's use of extreme isolation is flawed, but he claims that the system cannot be reformed "without the legislature and the public."

On October 10th the NYCLU released *Boxed In: The True Cost of Extreme Isolation in New York's Prisons*, an unprecedented investigation of the use of extreme isolation in the state.

Our investigation revealed that extreme isolation is often a disciplinary tool of first resort. Individuals spend weeks, months and even years in extreme isolation for non-violent, minor misbehavior. For example, one individual received six months for failing to promptly return a food tray.

Consider DOCCS Commissioner Brian Fischer's comments about extreme isolation: "I'll be the first to admit, we overuse it," he said during a New York State Bar Association panel discussion in January. But Fischer has claimed that our leaders in Albany lack the "political will" to initiate reform even as other states, like Mississippi, Maine and Colorado have instituted sweeping reforms to the use of extreme isolation that have maintained prison safety and reaffirmed their commitment to basic human dignity. ■

Right: Unity is a matter of life and death in all 'hoods – in the prisons and on the streets. The Youth Justice Council rallied outside the LA County Men's Jail at 10 a.m. on 10/10, the day set by the Pelican Bay Prison Short Corridor Collective for the beginning of the end of racial hostilities.
– Photo: Virginia Gutierrez



Left: A large, enthusiastic crowd, including prisoners' families and supporters as well as youth, turned out for the 10/10 rally in LA.
– Photo: Virginia Gutierrez

LETTERS

LETTERS

[*Note: Names of letter writers will be withheld unless the author of the letter explicitly approves printing of their name.*]

Support Our Publications

I know at times your *Rock* newsletter may not specifically need stamps, but the stamps that we collect here in Corcoran SHU (4B-3R) are being donated for you use and in support of the publications coming in to us.

The faucet of cooperation doesn't always flow that swiftly, so the idea I presented in my last letter was to encourage people here at Corcoran and elsewhere to take the initiative to gather one stamp per month from friends around them and donate them to the *Rock*, *PHSS News*, and *Prison Focus*.

There are thousands of us in prison who both enjoy and benefit from these publications by keeping us all informed and updated on the progress or lack of and I see no reason why you all should struggle to put out information which is beneficial to us in here! A little contribution from us all who are able is a small price to pay when it's for the betterment of our conditions and for a positive change.

I see a long road ahead of us in this fight for change and I'm confident your publication(s) will be an important and informative tool in this struggle. So I'd like to again encourage people who read your newsletter to make a collective effort to contribute stamps or money.

Pascual Gosselin, Corcoran

Is *Rock* Vacillating?

Apparently there are too many misconceptions regarding the history of California prison politics. It is not synonymous with the politics of prison. I am a theorist of this state's prison politics dating back to the 1970s. Under the strategy of the prison politics, especially amongst the indefinite SHU segment, today's social legal relations have developed across racial lines, against all odds. For decades there are those of us who have been laboring mentally and physically towards overcoming racial antagonisms, conformism, alienation, chauvinism, irrationalism, obscurantism, and inhumanity. I espouse the ideology of New Afrikan Revolutionary Nationalism,

which is not in opposition to the ideology of Marxism. Prison politics have been the transforming force since the term was coined. It is not the politics of reactionaries. I embrace constructive criticism in the interest of development. The *Rock* newsletter isn't the proper venue to engage in an ideological debate regarding the value of California's prison politics. But I will state [that Ed's various publications] have, for several decades, advanced the idea, principles and doctrine of Marxism—dialectical and historical materialism. It is with full respect of yours and my own particular ideology that teaches that the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all.

The ideological integrity and culture of the new man continues to be a model of communist education in prison politics. As the sole editor of the *Rock* newsletter you chose to keep the newsletter apolitical, and it is of course is entirely within your discretion to vacillate. Yet in doing so you change the context of the newsletter. *Rock* readers are bound by a social contract; all parties are bound by a mutual obligation to stay in context when submitting a piece to be published.

Louis Powell, PBSP-SHU

[**Ed's Response:** I'm guilty of vacillating on the political front. I want this newsletter to be a respected source of information for all SHU prisoners, and not something dismissed off-hand as mere commie propaganda. While I always write from a class conscious perspective, I have still not been throwing readers the ideological "red meat" they need in order to develop a lasting and successful struggle. I've been overly focusing on quantity rather than quality. There should be more balance.]

Support From Valley State Women's Prison

Thank you so much for sending me the ... information I asked for pertaining to the hunger strikes that took place in the SHU units of Pelican Bay.... Many of us women housed here at VSPW are more than willing to show support 100%. I have already drafted letters to our Governor and Sacramento regarding our views on the subject. I hope that some or all change will come out of the sacrifice and struggle we as prisoners and some of us "lifers" put forth in order to be treated as decent human beings. I feel a

deep sadness for the men housed in the SHU units throughout California, especially those in Pelican Bay. For years I have heard about the inhumane treatment the men suffer and the reasons and tactics used just to try and create snitching or debriefers in exchange for freedom. How low will they go? These men are stripped of the basic necessities in order to survive.

They don't even allow them to correspond with other prisoners due to the label they have placed on them without merit and on the word of another inmate trying to escape the means of SHU or falsified information provided by these informants and COs. Validation without merit is truly predatory in my opinion. Alleging the men as gang members in order to fill a unit and create an inhumane environment equal to that of a dog kennel, the real gang members are the group inflicting...and participating in such degrading acts... They just take and take, leaving one to feel less than what they are, all we have is our dignity and whatever force that builds our character to give us the strength to endure all the shit thrown at our cages. Yes, this is a human zoo in reality....

P.S. To all the men who fight for decency, God bless all of you and the supporters that print all of your letters and help get the word out.

Name Withheld

Step Down 7.0

I received the 7.0 draft of the Step Down Program. It's not right. It seems that more and more of us will be back here [in the SHU/Ad Seg] for some nonsense. If you or someone near you has a problem then you become STG I or STG II. I'm sharing this information with everyone in my pod. We must educate each other about this bullshit program.

Name Withheld, Calipatria

My celly went to committee and they told him that November 1st they're supposed to start the Step Down Program. They said that five and six blocks here in Tehachapi 4B are gonna be Step 3 (Step Down Program) and that seven and eight block are going to be Step 4.

Name Withheld, Tehachapi

Letters Continued on page 8

Stamp Harassment

In the last issue of *Rock* you requested that we send stamps, and like before I did so. Except this time it wasn't going down. The next day at mail call my letter was returned with a post-it saying "return to inmate, violation 3006(b) contraband-stamps."

After looking it up in Title 15 it states: Contraband, 3006(b) Money. "Inmates may not possess money." It doesn't mention anything about stamps or sending out stamps. This is just one of the recent roadblocks we've run into up here at the Bay. I'll ask my family to send some stamps to you though.

Name Withheld, Pelican Bay

[Ed's Response: This is one of several letters reporting that the prison administration is misapplying the law in order to keep you from materially supporting *Rock*. Readers are urged to exhaust administrative remedies, not only on the misapplication of the rule, but also on First Amendment grounds. Your captors are trying to prevent you from supporting a publication that serves your interests.]

Commie Rhetoric

This is in response to the "commie rhetoric" in Vol. 1, #10 of *Rock*. I must agree that communism and what it's truly about is not only suppressed but is distorted in many ways. And since we are coming to a crossroads, now more than ever choices

must be made. The backwardness of class "cannibalism" is not what we need at this time. Progressive through and more, communist thought is what is truly needed to bring about real revolutionary change. To keep going in the destructive path of lumpen on lumpen is not only causing disdain and death, but sharper divisions between what is the oppressed Black, Latino, Native, Indians, etc., and taking us further away from what needs to be done. Simply put, the gangsta lifestyle is not in the best interest of our people and gangs took a different path than what they were originally.

Now what is needed is a new way and train of thought. The culture capitalism gives birth to is the springboard for new forms of backwardness. All prisoners should know it's a vicious cycle, by being stuck in our backwardness we aint gonna get much accomplished or done.

Bobby Villado, Tehachapi

I think you should share your opinions and insights as much as possible. You have experience in this area as where we're just getting started. Please pass on that knowledge. I think the communist stuff is good. I'd like to see this lead to a permeated attitude rather than just an isolated SHU/Prison Reform act that we accomplish. I think the time is ripe.

Name Withheld, Pelican Bay

Radio Outreach

I am sending the below address out to those who have someone that can possibly call or write to Eureka Spanish radio station and talk to Mario about our side of the struggle against CEDCR and specifically about PBSP.

Any time a riot breaks out on a yard he reads the same old propoganda press releases that CDCR puts out on the news-wire. He will comment on how the races should work together so with Oct. 10th coming up and the call for us all to unite in the struggle against CDCR he might give more air time to a caller and/or might talk more to a different audience that is not reading the *Rock*. The address is: La Nueva 1310, Box 109, Eureka, CA 95502. Phone (707) 444-8455.

On another note, a couple of years ago PBSP was spending five grand a year on video movies rentals. They could not explain to me why they paid so much for crappy movies other than to say "...it's a contract." At that time I had told them to cancel the contract, rent movies/TV se-

ries though Netflix at \$25 a month and use the excess money to pay for all new cable channels and new radio stations. As usual, PBSP said they couldn't. Just shows another way of how they waste our I.W.F. money.

W. Hopeau, PBSP

Validated SHU Women

I know that the newsletter pace is usually prioritized for the HS representatives, with all due respect, we women here in VSPW would like very much to let all collective reps know that their HS movement is acknowledged among us women who share the same principles when it involves CDCR's corrupted tactics used for the gain of control over us prisoners as a whole. Being in a women's prison is a lot different than the men's' prisons. We women are a minority so we are lumped together. SNY does not exist and our political beliefs are not recognized, yet we women are unjustly labeled as "gang associates" for reasons like a letter from a friend or photo of a recognized "alleged gang member" whom may just be a brother, husband or loved one. Because of this we are placed in the SHU unit and validated as gang associates. All of the information printed in the *PHSS News* and *Rock* newsletters is helpful to us women who fact the same impasses (inescapable predicaments). We have also read the version 7.0 draft (Blueprint) of course we oppose its contents. In the *Rock*, October issue (Vol. 1 #10) article written by Mutope (Mr. James Crawford) I found that he is correct on his points raised. Version 7.0 targets *all* prisoners, not just those being held in the SHU/Ad-Seg units. We are wise to the strategies of our oppressors, it is harder for them (CDCR) to plot against us. This is in reference to what Mr. Crawford writes about *our emotional connections*. I also know from years of incarceration that CDCR is unwilling to bend. They are a profit driven class "fuel" of these human perpetual prisoner machines they call SHUs. We as a united force can bring it down by getting back to the very form of mentality Mutope talks about. Everyone!!

Also, Mr. Ed, with that said, I want to thank you for all that you do for prisoners. I think you are awesome! Twenty stamps are enclosed.

Diane Mirabail, AKA Spider, VSPW

[Ed's Comment: I receive a lot of letters expressing appreciation for the work I do. I almost always edit those out. But this one was really nice so I thought I'd share it.]

The drawing below is one of the dog cages CDCR continues to use in an effort to control a population that refuses to embrace their incarceration.



Dog Cage by Richard Jackson D52210

CAPITALISM, THE PRISON SYSTEM, AND ITS INTERCONNECTION

By C. Landrum

As a species, to continue living we must first and foremost procreate, feed, clothe, and shelter ourselves above all else. And only through cooperating with one another can these necessities be realized. Hence the source of our social essence.

Today in the current state of economic development (capitalism-imperialism) the vast majority of the world's people have been separated from their means of production (land, natural resources, technology, intellectual property, factories, etc.) by property rights which the capitalist classes of the world, who predominately reside within first world borders, have laid claim to. And yet this doesn't change the fact that as a species we still need access to the world's resources so that we may continue living.

Under this form of economy the world's masses won very little if anything at all, and are forced to sell to the capitalist classes the only thing they do own so that they may in turn purchase life's necessities. And what they sell to the capitalists is their labor power.

With a small exception, the capitalists purchase this labor power from the majority of the world's masses far below its value. This is not only the source of profit and capital (surplus value), it is the creation and perpetuation of today's racial oppression and social inequalities, including the source of today's prison industrial complex.

Surplus value is that value which is created through unpaid labor power. For example, if a capitalist invests \$1,000 a day for the production of shirts—\$200 of which pays for the cost of human labor power (variable capital), and \$800 which pays for the cost of electricity, oil, cloth, thread, technology, etc. (constant capital), and if it takes, let's say, five hours to produce \$1,000 worth of shirts (the original amount invested), this five hours of expended labor power is the true value of the workers' labor power. But being that this labor power has been purchased and therefore is now owned and controlled by the capitalists, the workers are required to expend their labor power for the remainder of the working day, whether it be 10, 12, 14, or however many hours the capitalist can get away with. In search of higher profits, imperialist expan-

sion takes the capitalist across the globe under the guise of spreading democracy, looking for the cheapest source of labor power and natural resources, i.e., where the people are most desperate and can be thoroughly exploited along with their natural resources. It is this cheap source of labor and natural resources that is at the root of capitalism's so-called "economic success."

Let's say 12 hours constitutes a full working day for our shirt workers. If it takes five hours to make a \$1,000 worth of shirts, our shirt workers are still required to expend their labor power for an additional seven hours—the remainder of the working day. These seven hours over and beyond the five hours is surplus labor—seven hours of unpaid labor power that the capitalist is robbing from the workers.

Being that workers are paid in either hourly wages, piecemeal, or by the day, these various forms of payment only serve to disguise and camouflage the unpaid surplus labor, creating a false appearance that the workers are being paid for all of their labor power which simultaneously disguises the parasitical nature of capitalism.

In a nutshell the capitalists pay the workers below the value of their labor power and pocket the difference in the form of profits and reproduction of capital (surplus value) upon the sale of the goods produced by the workers. What does this have to do with us as a prison population? This mode of production not only creates and perpetuates already existing poverty; it creates with these objective conditions the corresponding subjective ideology that fuels the development of a prison industrial complex.

All prison struggles transcend their prison walls whether we are conscious of this or not. It is not "us" as a nation pitted against other nations we have been taught and programmed to believe throughout our lives. The prison system is just one aspect of a much larger interconnected class struggle that transcends all national borders. We as a prison population must deepen our knowledge and raise our political consciousness.

We must transform our incorrect narrow nationalistic views into a scientifically correct internationalist outlook and recognize the concrete material reality that we are just one of the numerous side effects of an outdated and insufficient economic system that results in the social inequalities where a prison system becomes necessary

to protect the stolen riches and privileges of a small powerful elite—the same profit driven economic system that oppresses and exploits 3rd world peoples around the globe. Our interests do not lie in siding with our own domestic ruling classes in the imprisoning of over two million of our own population, or in the exploitation of billions of 3rd world people around the globe. Our interests, however overwhelming as it may seem, lies with our own impoverished and 3rd world people against not only our own capitalist ruling class and its beneficiaries, but against all capitalist ruling classes of the world regardless of national borders.

So long as we live in a society that's divided into social classes, the preservation and need for a prison system is guaranteed. And any achievements gained internally or externally of the prisons themselves, as welcomed as they are, will be purely reformist, i.e., temporary. To be successful as possible and maintain continuity in struggle (progress), our ultimate goal must be that of a classless society—that is the abolition of the objective and subjective conditions that give rise to a prison system. ■

[The above piece was originally printed in Vol. 5, #12 (December 2005) issue of the *Prison Art* newsletter.]

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EDITORIAL COMMENTS

Gubernatorial Stuff

As reported in the last issue of this newsletter, the state senate passed Ammiano's prison media access bill. Well, who could have guessed, Gov. Brown has vetoed it, saying the bill "went too far." Heaven forbid the public should gain access to the one of most secretive areas of state power—a place so very pregnant with the potential of abuse. The good "liberal" governor also issued Executive Order B-11-11 that calls for enhanced airport-type security at state prisons to interdict contraband, such as wireless communication devices, from being introduced through visiting.

On the other hand, on September 28th the governor signed AB2530, which means that pregnant women can no longer be shackled in California's jails and prisons while giving birth. Wow! What progress!

Newsletter Stuff

I've had some people write and ask for a subscription to *Rock*, saying nobody in

their pod receives it. I honor those requests. But sometimes someone will do that and then fail to write their name and number legibly, making it impossible for me to give them a subscription. I also get request for information on how to subscribe.

I made a subscription box containing that information (on page 9) and will print it in nearly every issue. Subscriptions are \$15 a year or 30 stamps. That amount covers my costs of production and mailing, with just a bit left over to help those who have not contributed. Right now the mailing list is 193 people. Of that number 82 (close to half) have never contributed anything. So far this year people have contributed \$1,056 in money and 1,356 stamps. That's very good, and it allows me (and you who donate) to carry the burden for those who do not materially support this work.

As I mentioned in a previous issue, this is the first newsletter (in some 35 years of publishing stuff for prisoners) that has almost paid for itself. This is especially significant since the mailing list is so small, currently almost all SHU prisoners. Right now I'm still low on stamps so if you have some extras please send them. While *Rock*

has cash, I hate to use precious money for stamps when it could be better used for buying paper and printer toner.

I get a pretty good stack of mail every day and some questions pop up over and over again. One of these questions is if it's okay to send money from your prison account to my post office box (47449) for the *Rock* newsletter. Yes, you can send money to for the newsletter but don't make the payment out to *Rock* as I don't have a bank account in that name. Checks should be made out to Ed Mead. All checks from prisoners and their loved ones on the outside are set aside for the specific use by this newsletter. ■

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Outside folks can also have a free electronic copy of the newsletter sent to them each month by way of e-mail. Have them send requests for a digital copy to rock@prisonart.org.

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