

# !ROCK!

★ Working to Extend Democracy to All ★

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## CALIFORNIA CONVICTS SUE STATE AFTER CONTRACTING VALLEY FEVER

July 15, 2013 (AP/U-T San Diego)

Last week, inmates and former inmates at two California prisons who contracted valley fever while incarcerated filed a lawsuit against the state, AP/U-T San Diego reports (Thompson, AP/U-T San Diego, 7/12).

### About Valley Fever

Researchers estimate that each year more than 150,000 people nationwide contract an airborne fungus known as valley fever, or coccidioidomycosis.

The cocci fungus is commonly found in soil in much of the Southwestern U.S., and is especially common in California's Central Valley.

People can contract valley fever by breathing in cocci fungal spores (California

Healthline, 7/3).

The fungus typically causes mild to severe influenza-like symptoms. However, the infection also can spread from the lungs to other parts of the body and cause symptoms such as skin abscesses, blindness and death (AP/U-T San Diego, 7/12).

### Details of Current Outbreak

In early May, CDC began investigating the deaths of more than three dozen California inmates who had contracted the fungus at Avenal and Pleasant Valley state prisons in San Joaquin Valley.

The investigation was launched after federal receiver J. Clark Kelso -- who is charged with monitoring the state's prison health care system -- ordered the relocation of about 3,200 high-risk inmates from the two prisons.

Late last month, U.S. District Judge Thelton Henderson ordered California to move 2,600 inmates at risk of contracting valley fever out of the two prisons. The order gave the state seven days to begin the transfers and 90 days to complete the task. In addition, Henderson said no new inmates who are considered at risk of contracting the fungus should be sent to either prison (California Healthline, 7/3).

Jeffrey Callison -- a spokesperson for the state Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation -- said the state currently is working to comply with Henderson's order.

### Details of the Lawsuit

The lawsuit is seeking payment for lifetime medical care -- including medications that can cost as much as \$2,000 monthly

-- for inmates and former inmates who contracted valley fever in California prisons since July 2009. The current state policy is to provide a 30-day supply of the drugs upon parole for severely affected inmates.

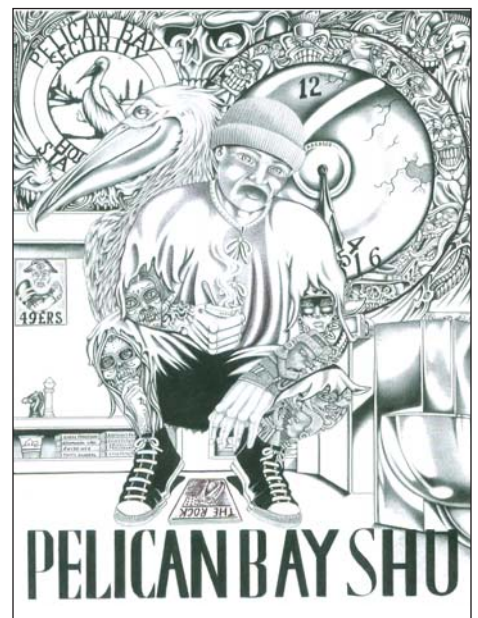
Individuals represented in the lawsuit include black, elderly and medically at-risk inmates and former inmates at the Avenal and Pleasant Valley prisons.

Ian Wallach -- an attorney representing the inmates -- said the prison system did not adequately protect them from the fungus, which he called "a life sentence that no judge had ordered."

Attorneys are seeking class-action status for the case. Wallach said his firm already has been contacted by more than 500 current and former prisoners regarding valley fever. ■

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The above art is by Chris Carrasco, PBSP.

## EDITORIAL 2-9

“If we give in the terrorists win.” That is essentially what Secretary Beard told the mediation team. He said there will be no negotiations with prisoners or their outside representatives. I write this on August 4<sup>th</sup>, just four days before the hunger strike has gone on for a full month.

Things may change between now and the time you read this. And what I am writing here is largely aimed at general population prisoners and their family members and loved ones on the streets. I hope you won't think me arrogant or presumptuous for suggesting a possible path ahead.

In my editorial comments in the Spring 2012 issue of *Prison Focus* (#38 at page 26) I said, “The leading SHU prisoners used the metaphor of a football game to describe their struggle. Continuing on with that metaphor, I think we are at half time. HS1 and HS2 were the first two quarters. Everyone can call the score what they like. I call it a draw.” We are no longer at half-time, today we are in the final phase of the third quarter. Even if CDCR were to toss out some face-saving bone or crumbs to striking prisoners, at this point I would nonetheless have to call this quarter a loss.

So the fourth quarter is now looming. I ask myself what I would do if I were in the position of rights conscious prisoners in California? There is some talk of going with what I call the nuclear option. Under this option individual prisoners would starving themselves to death one after the other, with larger scale outside support behind each volunteer. To learn more on this approach read about Bobby Sands and the hunger strike struggle the Irish Republican Army waged. They made many martyrs to the cause, including Bobby Sands himself, but politically it was a failure.

So I suppose I would go for the alternative, which is mass action for the final quarter<sup>1</sup> of this struggle. As we all know, the prisons cannot function for long without the labor of prisoners. A state-wide organization or union of prisoners will be required to win this battle. This is the most difficult option because it means the consciousness of regular mainline prisoners must be raised, a task that will require patience and time. Social prisoners must become rights conscious, and the rights conscious need to

1. The problem with the football metaphor is that it only gives us four quarters, whereas the struggle for justice will be protracted and may take thousands.

become class conscious. It would seem to me that this would be the task of existing rights and class conscious prisoners, not only in California but everywhere.

I would hold study groups on prisoner's rights, so all prisoners would understand that the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, a treaty the constitution says is the “law of the land” (above the constitution), proclaims that all humans have the inherent right to such things as equal protection under the law, *freedom of expression, and the freedom to work and form labor unions; to freedom from slavery, forced labor, torture, cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment* and arbitrary arrest or detention; to a standard of living adequate for health and well-being; and to be recognized as a person before the law.

All of these rights are inalienable—just because we are humans—and have as their goal the protection of human dignity and fullest development of the human personality. Again, *the right to form labor unions, freedom from slavery, torture, and inhuman treatment*. These are fundamental rights—including the right to organize into labor unions.

The U.S. Supreme Court has held that under the constitution prisoners do not have the right to unionize. But as I said, international treaties the U.S. is a signatory to is “the law of the land”, and yet not enforceable in the courts. It requires a political struggle in order to gain these rights. These are the lessons prisoners need to understand and internalize, and they will never be able accomplish that until they overcome their bourgeois conditioning and individualism.

As I've repeatedly said, you are all slaves of the state, a status legitimized by the Thirteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, which abolished slavery for all except for those convicted of a crime. You are held in conditions of dependency and irresponsibility, disenfranchised from the basic rights of citizenship such as the right to vote. If there was a segment of today's society that had a legitimate right to demand some level of justice it is prisoners. The task of advanced prisoners, those with a progressive consciousness, is to educate their less aware counterparts in matters of rights and class.

Back in the day, the late 1960s and up to the mid-1970s there were many major movements; including a drug legalization movement, a gay rights movement, and a prisoners' movement.

Today, here in Washington, the recreational use of marijuana is legal, as is gay marriage. But what ever happened to the prisoners' movement? I'll leave the answer to that question for another day, as this is a new day—a new start.

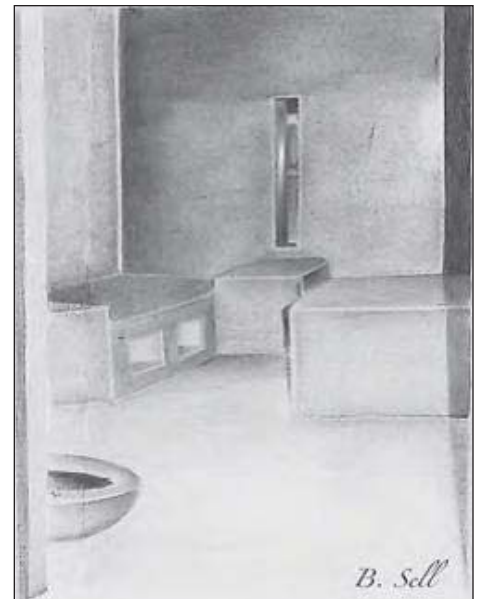
It may be years before the final quarter of this game is played, but when it comes to fruition it will be with an organized and rights and class conscious body of prisoners, ready to stand shoulder-to-shoulder with their working class brothers and sisters on the streets. They will peacefully withhold their labor, not in one prison, not in one state, but nationally, until the pro-slavery provision of the Thirteenth Amendment is abolished and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights is applied to prisoners.

Prisoners have the absolute right to peacefully go on work strikes. If not for the sake of those currently confined, then at least for the sake of generations of prisoners who will follow.

At some point it needs to dawn on prisoners that they are contributing to their own oppression. The longest journey starts with a single step. The starting point in this case is to initiate the peaceful struggle for the immediate implementation of the five core demands, while at the same time educating and raising the consciousness of the other prisoners with whom you're doing time. This will be a long struggle. Mainline prisoners will need to build cadre.

Yet when all is said and done what I think carries very little weight. Prisoners will do what they do, and so long as they do it peacefully I'll be here to support them. ■

Combat bourgeois individualism!



A SHU cell drawn by Billy 'Guero' Sell. The first hunger strike participant to die



# THE HUNGER STRIKE INTENSIFIES

We of the National Plantation Psychosis Awareness Committee (N.P.P.A.C. pronounced N-PAC) throughout CDCR our sincere solidarity and appreciation to the 33,000 plus who have unselfishly supported and/or participated in this most honorable and historical statewide/national hunger strikes. You of the masses have all done and continue to do a commendable job (each in your individual and collective capacity) in bringing the reality of this cause to the public at large, and doing so with the most impressive numbers this nation has ever seen!

However, as these numbers continue to taper off, as anticipated, you will increasingly hear prison officials, the media, and various misguided individuals say that this hunger strike is dying out. To the contrary, this hunger strike is *not* dying out, nor is it dictated by the initial sensationalism of numbers. Such thinking is wrong. As in all successful movements of this nature the success of the hunger strike is now entering the political phase of hyper-dramatization, which will be marked by self-sacrificing prisoner volunteers. These volunteers will be comparatively few, but will continue to unselfishly push this hunger strike until the last man is standing.

I have some serious underlying health conditions that put me at greater risk than some, or maybe even most, combined with my age factor (55), but these are only calculations set by man not the supreme creator. So I personally vowed on day one not to give in until *all* of our collective demands are fully met or the creator calls me home for even greater rewards.

It would be foolish to think that the magnitude of the honorable demands for basic human rights, as laid out in detail by our comrades of Pelican Bay, will be met by CDCR without a significant death count. Therefore, it is inevitable that some of us will die in this struggle before the public's outcry will persuade CDCR to capitulate to our very reasonable demands.

Therefore, it can only behoove our designated negotiators and representatives not to negotiate any of the 45 demands until those of us who have self-appointed ourselves to carry this struggle to the end have had the opportunity to make their/our full contribution. It will be these contributions and the

public's angry outcry that will be the deciding factor in this demonstration.

We are just now turning into the final stretch, so I implore the designated representatives to please not prematurely negotiate our demands until *all* of our resources are fully and effectively engaged.

Dare to struggle, dare to win, or god damn it all! ■

*Bryan Ransom (AKA Imara Rafiki),  
Corcoran, August 11, 2013, Day 35*

[**Ed's Note:** The hunger strike is the only means of protest for the totally powerless. While I disagree with the use of tactics that harm or weaken us, I do understand why some will feel the need to carry this approach to its ultimate conclusion. But as I've often said, the only sure means of securing *and enforcing* concessions from CDCR is by mainline prisoners peacefully withholding their labor. The prisons cannot function for long without the labor of prisoners, therein lays CDCR's Achilles heel and the path to any true victory. Yes, I am talking about dual power. CDCR has had all the power and they've massively abused it and the public's trust. It is time to give prisoners some of the responsibility. Dual power was implemented at the Washington State Penitentiary in the early 1970s and was successful until ultimately sabotaged by prison guards. Lessons have been learned since then.]

## THE FIRST DEATH

It is with a heavy, heavy heart I bring you the news that a hunger striker housed in 4B-3L of the Corcoran SHU, named Billy Michael Sell, more commonly known as 'Guero', died on Monday the 22nd of July. I spoke with several prisoners today about him, some that knew him very well and they were very somber and concerned. The prisoners say, "Billy died because of the Hunger Strike." That he was "strong, was a good person, a good soldier" and that the allegations by CDCR that this was a suicide are, "completely out of character for him and that he wasn't like that" Several guys stated, "No one believes he killed himself" He was supposedly going without water as well as food and may have had other health issues, that is unknown. As stated below, Guero is reported to have started asking for medical attention around the 15th or 16th of July, in which he did not receive and died 4 days later. He is from

Riverside but none of the guys knew how to contact his family.

Here is more about him from a letter drafted for the Statewide Medical Executive, Dr. Tharrett:

We have confirmed that CDCR claims that Billy Sell, P41250, age 32, housed in the Security Housing Unit, allegedly took his own life on July 22, 2013.

According to information we have gathered, Mr. Sell was not under care for mental illness at the time of his death. According to other inmates near his cell, he had been requesting medical attention for a few days and had not received it by July 22. The other prisoners who knew Billy confirmed that he was on the hunger strike and said it would be very strange and uncharacteristic of him to take his own life. Inmates said that the guards reported he had hanged himself. The other prisoners doubt the veracity of that story.

So the time has come that we were dreading but also trying to prepare for. No matter how Billy died, his life mattered and I believe that we as a coalition need to respond. I would like to suggest that we do some kind of vigil/press conference/rally at the CDCR building in Oakland, unless that was already being organized. Of course we can talk about this at Mondays meeting but I really think we should start thinking of ideas now.

I know that the mediation team is preparing look into further investigation on the legal front, so we will see what happens with that. In the meantime of any of your loved ones/correspondents/etc. are housed at Corcoran in 4B-3L and they may have some info about this, have known him, heard him requesting medical attention, please let us know.

I hope you all are well and with someone you love. In honor and respect of Billy <Guero> Sell, ■

*Dendron*



Billy 'Guero' Sell, a self-portrait.

# LETTERS

[*Note: For the present all names of letter writers will be withheld so the state cannot accuse us of secret communication between prisoners.*]

## Phych Ward Solidarity

Revolutionary Greetings [...] I am in the "Phychiatric Services Unit/SHY", and me and a couple of other principled prisoners are planning/preparing to successfully participate in the upcoming hunger strike starting on July 8<sup>th</sup>, 2-13, which would be a surprise to CDCR to have supposedly 'mentally ill' prisoners partaking in such a peaceful protest it's humbling.

[*Name withheld*],

## PBSP Yard Update

Thanks for all your hard work in keeping us prisoners informed on extremely dire prison conditions and the sham this is (CDCR). It's much appreciated [...] So here goes an update of what's been happening at (PBSP) B. Yard Level (4) (180) Desin (GP) to be printed verbatim in the next issue. Signed B. Yard (GP) Level (4) (180) (PSSP)

In June 2013 all inmates collectively submitted 25 reasonable demands supporting the statewide Hunger Strike Work Strike to begin on July 8<sup>th</sup>. Not getting into all of the demands now, but here's a few.

Comply with the title 15 giving all inmates their 10hours a week yard time since we never receive 10 hours a week and more like 10 hours a month if we're lucky.

Comply with the DOM and stop stripping every single inmate out individually before yard, medical education etc. as this drastically cuts into our yard time/program. As every inmate must be wanded and stripped out naked, before they can enter the yard. Giving us an hour of actual yard time max do to this procedure.

Stop harassing inmates to debrief when they ask for what they got coming because it's common for Cos to say if you don't like something debrief and you'll be given everything on an SNY yard closer to home.

Create more jobs/educational programs as there are no jobs and A2B inmates are treated like there being punished for being A2B with slim to no privileges. IE more than 1 call a month, weekend yard, etc. As everyone should be given the opportunity

to attain A1A status and not stay A2B for years because of no jobs/programs which is common here.

Create an inmate photo program allowing inmates regardless of their status to take one photo a month. Because unless you receive a visit at PBSP while on a GP yard you'll never be able to take a picture to send to loved ones/family. Depriving people who don't get visits, or who's loved ones can't make the drive up of ever receiving a photo.

Comply with the tile 15 and deliver inmates packages in two weeks. Since packages take up to six weeks to be delivered with R&R only coming to the block once a month. As you get the picture.

So on July 8<sup>th</sup>, 2013 all inmates of every race collectively participated in a 10 day Work Strike with all Southern Hispanics/Whites participating in the Hunger Strike as well. From three days to 10 depending on how people felt. Well as the media reported CDCR retaliated with at first prior to July 8<sup>th</sup> threats of validation, going to the hole, etc. Coming to everyone's cell at 7:30am on July 8<sup>th</sup> giving people direct orders to report to work who had jobs. From kitchen workers to porters and all education, even though they never planned to run any program PERIOD. Even going to people cells who haven't worked in months saying they now had jobs. So they could issue as many 115's as possible. Since word was Sacramento shut down taking the whole yard to ASU/The Hole. So long story short everyone who refused 9 consecutive meals or work/education receives 115's with those who participated in both the Hunger Strike and Work Strike receiving 2 115's. Now the Hunger Strike write up was willfully delaying a peace officer from performing assigned duties/participation in mass Hunger Strike even though not once after the 9<sup>th</sup> meal were inmates pulled out by medical personal and checked for weight, blood pressure, etc...And the Work Strike 115 was for refusing to report to assigned duties.

Consequences for one or both C-Status, loss of credit, jobs, TVs, packages, hard, etc...and to a few unlucky ones C over C status where one loses all appliances for six months and given the opportunity to either send their TV CD players home or donate them for being program failures. So needless to say most of the yard is on C-Status for 30 to 90 days with not one demand being met and just shame how retal-

iatory CDCR has become during a historic peaceful protest. But nonetheless spirits are high and just a small sacrifice compared to decades of solitary confinement many have suffered. Truly believe that true change beneficial to all is soon to come and this just the beginning of the end of draconian tactics/mind games by the CDCR.

[*Name withheld*],

*B Yard GP Level 4, PBSP*

## From Death Row SHU

On July 30, 2013, Day 23 of the statewide hunger strike, at approximately 1 p.m., prisoners on my tier began alerting Adjustment Center custody staff that one of the hunger strike participants was unresponsive. Prisoners kept yelling, "Man down!" and banged on their doors for about 10 minutes until a goon squad was formed.

One of that goon squad was an Officer Persaud, who sarcastically ordered the apparently semi-conscious man-down to come to his door and cuff up. After this potentially life-threatening delay and a "mechanical issue" getting the cell door to open, the goon squad finally stormed in as if pouncing.

A second man-down situation followed about an hour later with similar response.

Custody staff are clearly expressing resentment toward the hunger strike participants, and my suggestion to them is that if their current job is not to their liking, they should either quit and go back to Burger King or get their torture unit overlords to grant the reasonable request for basic human needs set forth in the open letter. ■

[*Name withheld*]

## Open letter to the citizens of California

At least we demand we be treated like human beings and citizens. Demand an end to solitary confinement except when it is absolutely necessary and only then as a temporary solution. Help us gain access to education, basic amenities, and rehabilitative services. Make the state comply with all the court orders and recommendations from respected world bodies, human rights organizations, and concerned citizens. Stop funding the system and making it profitable for some. There are many, many things you can do, Citizens, to end our suffering. Teach us about empathy and compassion

# AUTHORIZATION FOR RELEASE OF INFORMATION

YOUR INFORMATION			
Last Name:	First Name:	Middle Name:	Date of Birth:
Address:	City/State/Zip:	CDC/YA Number:	

Person/Organization Providing the Information	Person/Organization to Receive the Information
Name: _____	Name: _____
Address: _____	Address: _____
City/State/Zip: _____	City/State/Zip: _____
Phone #: (____) _____	Phone #: (____) _____
Fax Number: (____) _____	Fax Number: (____) _____

[45 C.F.R. § 164.508(c)(1) (iii) & Civ. Code § 56.11(e), (f)]

Description of the Information to be Released (Provide a detailed description of the specific information to be released) [45 C.F.R. § 164.508(c)(1)(i) & Civ. Code §§ 56.11(d) & (g)]		
<input type="checkbox"/> Medical	<input type="checkbox"/> Mental Health	<input type="checkbox"/> Genetic Testing
<input type="checkbox"/> Dental	<input type="checkbox"/> Substance Abuse/Alcohol	<input type="checkbox"/> Communicable Disease
<input type="checkbox"/> HIV	<input type="checkbox"/> Psychotherapy Notes	<input type="checkbox"/> Other (Please Specify)
_____.		
For the following period of time: From _____ (date) to _____ (date)		

Description of Each Purpose for the Use or Release of the Information (Indicate how the information will be used) [45 C.F.R. § 164.508(c)(1)(iv)]		
<input type="checkbox"/> Health Care	<input type="checkbox"/> Personal Use	<input type="checkbox"/> Legal
<input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify) _____		

**Will the health care provider receive money for the release of this information?**

[45 C.F.R. § 164.524 (c) (4) (i), (ii)]

Reasonable fees may be charged to cover the cost of copying and postage.

This authorization for release of the above information to the above-named persons/organizations will expire on: \_\_\_\_\_ (date). [45 C.F.R. § 164.508(c)(1)(v) & Civ. Code § 56.11(h)]

**I understand:**

- I authorize the use or disclosure of my individually identifiable health information as described above for the purpose listed. I understand that this authorization is voluntary. [45 C.F.R. § 164.508(c)(2)(i)]
- I have the right to revoke this authorization by sending a signed notice stopping this authorization to the health Records department at my current institution. The authorization will stop further release of my health information on the date my valid revocation request is received in the Health Records department. [45 C.F.R. § 164.508(c)(2)(i) & Civ. Code § 56.11(h)]
- I am signing this authorization voluntarily and that my treatment will not be affected if I do not sign this authorization. [45 C.F.R. § 164.508(c)(2)(ii)]
- Under California law, the recipient of the protected health information under the authorization is prohibited from re-disclosing the information, except with a written authorization or as specifically required or permitted by law. If the organization or person I have authorized to receive the information is not a health plan or health care provider, the released information may no longer be protected by federal privacy regulations. [45 C.F.R. 164.508(c)(2)(ii)]
- I understand I have the right to receive a copy of this authorization. [Civ. Code § 164.508 (c)(4) and Civ. Code § 56.11(i)]

Signature:	CDC/YA Number:	Date:
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[45 C.F.R. § 164.508(c)(1)(vi) & Civ. Code § 56.11(c)(1)]

Representative:	Relationship:	Date:
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[45 C.F.R. § 164.508(g)(1) & Civ. Code § 56.11(c)(2)]



with action – and I promise we will return these actions.

The same hands that once destroyed communities can rebuild them. We have the influence to be the role models too. We can tell the young ones to end hostilities out there the same way hostilities have been ended in here. We can encourage peace in unique ways. But we need a stake in this society too! We need to be embraced, worked with and rewarded.

Thank you, Citizens, for hearing our voice. We look forward to a better future for all Californians.

*[Name Withheld] on Day 5 of the Hunger Strike, Tehachapi-SHU*

### Corcoran State Prison

I was planning on only “fasting” for two to three days at a time. But I feel good after these three days. I am thinking about going longer. I am not sure how long I will go. I am caught up in the principles behind this hunger strike. I am feeling the solidarity of this revolt by prisoners and their determination to throw off the yoke of subjugation. It feels good to witness the reemergence of the prison rebellion of the 1960s and 1970s. It is very difficult to rally the prisoners to rebel against the inhumanity of this prison system and the outright violation of prisoners’ constitutional rights. Correctional officers and administrators violate state and federal laws with no apprehension of consequences. It is difficult to rally prisoners to rebel because of the wide network of inmate agent provocateurs who will usually abort any thoughts of uprising or rebellion before it leaves the womb of mental conception.

*[Name Withheld]*

### Question

On 7/3/2013, I received a visit from 2 California Prison Focus volunteers. Two women, one white lady and one Mexicana lady (names omitted) came. I told them that I will accept visits from CPF volunteers at any point in the hunger strike. They were telling me about some form that prisoners can get from the nurses that would allow CPF people to request prisoners medical records regarding our current health status.. What exactly are these forms she was speaking of?

*[Name Withheld]*

**[Ed’s Response:** That form is contained in this issue on pages five and six. I had to eliminate two pages of letters from prisoners in order to include these forms.]

## A RESPONSE TO CDCR SECRETARY BEARD

*By Caitlin Kelly Henry*

In a recent OpEd, CDCR Secretary Beard, defends his agency’s use of torture, and justifies it by vilifying and dehumanizing some of its victims. Conditions in CDCR’s SHUs meet international definitions of unlawful torture. Sensory deprivation is torture. Prolonged isolation is torture. California, unlike most states and nations, refuses to recognize that it is both unlawful and poor public policy to punish people with prolonged isolation. Though no other jurisdiction appears to deny that these practices constitute solitary confinement.

These conditions cause permanent physical and psychological effects. As an attorney and academic, I have conducted over 60 interviews with people sequestered in SHUs, and have witnessed the physical and psychological effects of isolation. Having recently visited strikers, I can attest that as a result of their non-violent demonstration, they are experiencing irreversible and life threatening effects that will only worsen if CDCR and Governor Brown do not take action immediately.

Hunger and work strikes by disfranchised people, who have little to leverage but their bodies, have earned a dignified and noble legacy in human and civil rights movements. The last three California prison strikes have succeeded in shining light on atrocious living conditions typically shielded from the public behind prison walls.

The OpEd misrepresents CDCR’s de-jure policies, and avoids addressing its de-facto policies, which arise from prison staff’s vast discretion in policy interpretation and execution. The OpEd attempts to narrow the discussion to CDCR’s treatment of the sub-group of people staff accuse of being affiliated with gangs and focus on the strike’s second demand. However, the other four demands, concern issues affecting all prisoners in solitary, many of whom are never accused of gang activity.

CDCR continues to arbitrarily discipline and move people to solitary confinement without adequate due process, whether for a determinate term (though people are often held after the term’s end) or indeterminate term. Currently, CDCR is issuing rules violations to hunger strikers simply for not

eating, and charging participants and non-participants with “gang related activity” for showing support for the strike. These violations can be used to send people to the SHU, keep them there, or deny people post-conviction relief (parole, prop 36 resentencing, etc.). To issue so many on such specious grounds at a moment when CDCR is mandated to release 10,000 people is emblematic of the due process violations the strike seeks to address.

As CDCR moves people to or within the SHU, staff have denied people access to their property. This includes placing people in a cell with a mattress, but no sheets or blanket, for days on end. Pelican Bay SHU cells have no windows or skylights, and the murky slits in the concrete at Corcoran can hardly be called windows. Light comes from a fluorescent bulb that is never shut off.

Especially since the strike’s announcement, CDCR has routinely denied people the ability to leave their cells for weeks on end, whether to shower, use the “yard” (either a metal cage or a small room with four concrete walls but no roof), or access the law library to meet court deadlines. With no access to the yard, some people exercise in their cells...but if they do so at the same time as others, the exercise is labeled as gang activity.

Access to other in-cell activities - like television, radio, books, or education - is contingent on having funds. Funds require either work (which many SHU inmates are prohibited from) or contacts on the outside. In the OpEd CDCR lauds how its “[r]estricting...communication...has saved lives both inside and outside prison walls” yet claims people can send and receive letters and visit every weekend.

In reality, CDCR’s extreme prohibitions and restrictions on phones, letters, and visits destroy lives by interfering with constructive family and attorney communications. This flies in the face of correctional best practices, which evidence that maintaining community ties decreases recidivism and supports reentry. As a rule, SHU inmates are also denied reentry-facilitating activities, such as interaction with other people in religious service, therapy, classes, or meals. Since the strike CDCR has even confiscated books, mail, TVs and radios.

Governor Brown and Secretary Beard must cease their deliberate indifference and end the standoff by meeting the five demands. ■

# A RESPONSE TO A SHU PRISONERS' CRITICISM OF THE OUTSIDE STRIKE SUPPORT EFFORT

By Ed Mead

The amount of outside support for this current and third hunger strike has been unprecedented, and included community supporters, ex-convicts, family members and loved ones of prisoners, all working together toward the common goal of implementing the five core demands. From what I can see, the outside support was larger and more efficient than it was back during the first two hunger strikes. The progressive community has clearly demonstrated a unity and purpose that has been successful in amplifying the voice of the striking prisoners.

The stars that shine the brightest, of course, are the prisoners in California who have sacrificed so much of themselves during this bitterly fought struggle for justice. This is not to take anything away from those who ended their hunger strikes early, as nobody expects strikers to go as far as the Irish hunger striker Bobby Sands and his comrades in Ireland (one hunger striker, Billy Michael Sell of Corcoran, has already died by, CDCR says, hanging himself the day after ending his 12<sup>th</sup> day of participation in the strike). Another prisoner who quit his fast after 12 days wrote a scathing criticism of the outside strike support effort, saying our weaknesses out here “neutralized” their struggle on the inside and that is why he is ending his strike. It is this criticism of our work that I write about today.

When we get criticisms, especially from a black SHU prisoner (which is the case here), we should always look for what is right with it, and not search for reasons why it's wrong. Even so, when it's so in-your-face wrong it just can't be ignored, it needs to be called like it is. I was in the Bay Area doing support work for the first two hunger strikes. I can attest to the huge amount of work they did. Today that once tremendous volume of work has doubled. Indeed, we can feel the impact of their work, not only up here in Seattle but nationally.

The prisoner criticizing us raised six issues in which our work out here failed. I'll address all each of them. His first complaint is that we on the outside frequently write to the reps but do not communicate “with every solitary confined prisoner” (emphasis in original). This is a classic case of being out of touch with our realities out here in

minimum custody—how few people we have and the small amount of money there is to work with.

To write a single letter to the 4,547 SHU prisoners (and who knows how many more Ad Seg prisoners) would break us, even if we did have all of their names and numbers. And to keep them informed we'd have to write each prisoner at least once a month. Who's going to write all those letters? Who's going to pay for the materials and postage? There is simply no possible way we could write to every prisoner locked down in solitary confinement.

Speaking only for myself, I rarely write letters to the reps but send letters by the stack in to other prisoners in that state, including letters to author of this criticism. While we out here can't possibly write letters to everyone locked down, we do have some very informational publications, most of which are specifically aimed at California prisoners.

Which brings us to his second complaint, our various publications carry articles only “by a *select* few individuals” (emphasis in original). This too is wrong. The publications he mentions are the *PHSS News*, *The S.F. Bay View*, *Prison Focus*, *The Abolitionist*, and *Rock*. More specifically, his criticism is that our publications only print articles by the representatives. Although I am not privy to receiving *PHSS News* or *The Abolitionist*, I do get *The Bay View* and of course I publish the *Rock* newsletter and am the Editor of *Prison Focus*. These last three publications rarely publish material from the Reps (unless it is news other SHU prisoners need to have).

Any SHU prisoner who is interested in knowing what's going on can subscribe to any of these publications for free. The fact that all of them are available to California prisoners is a remarkable achievement.

In reality, we on the outside are not “keeping the entire solitary confinement prisoner class faceless, nameless, and voiceless.” Our publications inform and communicate, and in fact, at least in the case of *Rock*, specifically target that so-called SHU class.<sup>1</sup>

1. Here I should admit that I've rejected at least one article by the prisoner doing the criticizing. It was so long it would have taken the entire *Rock* newsletter to print it. It dealt only with matters of interest to New

His third criticism is that “the outside community only displays material from the reps at community events, and not every solitary confined prisoner.” (again, emphasis in original). Assuming we could get photos and material from “every solitary confined prisoner”, just what side of some multistory building would we post it all on? Speaking for Seattle, we've never displayed materials from any of the reps at any of our events. The materials we distribute are written by us or other outside support people, but mostly we do banners and picket signs with slogans like “End The Torture” and “Meet the Five Demands”, etc.

And the most strike-related pictures of people I see passed around on the Internet are pictures of prisoners glued on to homemade posters that are being held by the family member or loved one of a particular prisoner.

Let's also not forget about the principle of leadership. The fact is the reps (who represent all races and regions) are the ones who called the struggle, who wrote the demands, got the law suit going, who negotiate with the pigs, who drafted the agreement to end hostilities, and who have in general been the leadership of all three hunger strikes. Moreover, they are currently bearing the brunt of the retaliation for all of those strikes.

As the reader can see, most of the criticisms directly or indirectly involve our communication with, or the duplication of materials produced by, the reps. To the extent the reps are getting more honey than any of the quitters, it is, well, because they've earned it. This is not a basis for criticism, it is, rather, exactly what we should be doing out here. Some of us may disagree with the political ideology of the reps, but we can all agree with their overall skill in building this now historic struggle.

The fourth criticism is that the “outside PHSS Coalition has been failing to discuss strategy and tactics with the inside PHSS Coalition (e.g. political prisoners, activists, etc)...” We on the outside have one task, and that was adopted early on—we are to amplify the voice of those struggling prisoners. That is exactly what we out here

Afrikan, and, worse, it had nothing to do with the struggle to implement the five core demands.



are doing. To my knowledge the support community does not discuss strategy or tactics with the reps.

When prisoners call a peaceful and just struggle people out here respond. It is the reps who have called that struggle. The progressive political community and family members on the West Coast and elsewhere have rallied behind those leading this struggle.

We strike supporters have been doing this work out here through three hunger strikes, and (to my knowledge) in those years this is the first and only complaint about how we perform our tasks. Moreover, I am not aware of any other prisoners telling us what to do. And I don't even see any strategic suggestions coming from the criticizer either, only complaints. In point of fact, what I hear from the inside (and I get a lot of prisoner mail) is gratitude for the work we do out here on the streets.

Yet when a black man charges us with racism we need to listen. The fifth and sixth criticism, and the most important ones in my book, implicitly charges us with racism. The criticism is that we on the outside failed to sufficiently reach out to the black community.

As mentioned before, during the first two hunger strikes I flew down to the Bay Area to help with the support effort, and in that process I attended many events put on in support of each of the hunger strikes. Some of these were put on by groups like All of Us or None, where a hundred or so people would be attending and I'd be one of only a few white people in attendance. With that said, could we do better in this regard? Sure. The support coalition is largely white. Yet, as I understand it, the role of whites is to combat white racism, not organize the black community.

I can't speak for the Bay Area's current work since I'm not there, but in the photos they send out and materials they publish there is always a good mix of races. As for Seattle we (Free Us All) have put on two educational hip hop events around the hunger strike, both in the largely black Central District, one was a week before the start of the hunger strike and the other last Sunday (July 21<sup>st</sup>).

The criticizer calls these six issues "contradictions" and says they are the reasons we failed to connect to the 30,000 prisoners who initially engaged in the hunger strike. In short, he says it is our fault that he and others prematurely quit the hunger strike.

If there is ever to be any meaningful change we must all take responsibility for what we do or don't do. The man doing the criticizing dropped out of the hunger strike after twelve days. It was then that he wrote a letter to the *S.F. Bay View* newspaper asking that his criticism be printed in that publication (as far as I know that's not happening).

Now let's put the shoe on the other foot, where it rightfully belongs. Why not ask where were the masses of family members and loved ones of those 30,000 prisoners? Why did those prisoners not activate or reach out to their support networks? Why was it left largely to us progressives and only a handful of family members?

It is you prisoners who need to get your act together, you need to organize yourselves and your loved ones—you must be your own liberators. And you are not ever going to do that by putting the blame for your own failures on others. This is something we prisoners do, and it's something that needs to stop.

As I wrote on page 30 of *Prison Focus* issue #37, just before the first hunger strike:

"Your struggles in there should in no way rely on those of us doing volunteer work on the outside. If you're going get it together, do it without any thought to prisoner-support organizations. Indeed, outside support is something that you should plan to grow from scratch, starting with your own friends and family members on the streets."

Those 29,000 prisoners who prematurely ended their fast should look inside themselves for the source of their failures, rather than seeking to cast the blame on those of us on the outside. We are open to criticism, but not to scapegoating.

Those on the inside who would pose as revolutionaries need to have a grasp of dialectical and historical materialism, so as to be better able to make analysis based on actual conditions in their processes of motion and change. Which is something different than merely blaming others for our individual weaknesses.

Any such analysis will show that the prisoners' struggle must, at its root, be led and organized by prisoners and their family members and loved ones. We few out here can support you, but it's your struggle. Take responsibility for it.

In the mean time we out here will continue to organize and fight in support of the five core demands in the best way we know how. The struggle continues. ■

## Quote Box

"Non-cooperation with evil is as much a duty as is cooperation with good."

*Mahatma Mohandas K. Gandhi - (1869-1948)*

"To ignore evil is to become an accomplice to it."

*Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.*

"Human progress is neither automatic nor inevitable... Every step toward the goal of justice requires sacrifice, suffering, and struggle; the tireless exertions and passionate concern of dedicated individuals."

*Martin Luther King, Jr.*

"Where justice is denied, where poverty is enforced, where ignorance prevails, and where any one class is made to feel that society is an organized conspiracy to oppress, rob and degrade them, neither persons nor property will be safe."

*Frederick Douglass*

"The genius of our ruling class is that it has kept a majority of the people from ever questioning the inequity of a system where most people drudge along, paying heavy taxes for which they get nothing in return."

*Gore Vidal, Author*

"We can either have democracy in this country or we can have great wealth concentrated in the hands of a few, but we can't have both."

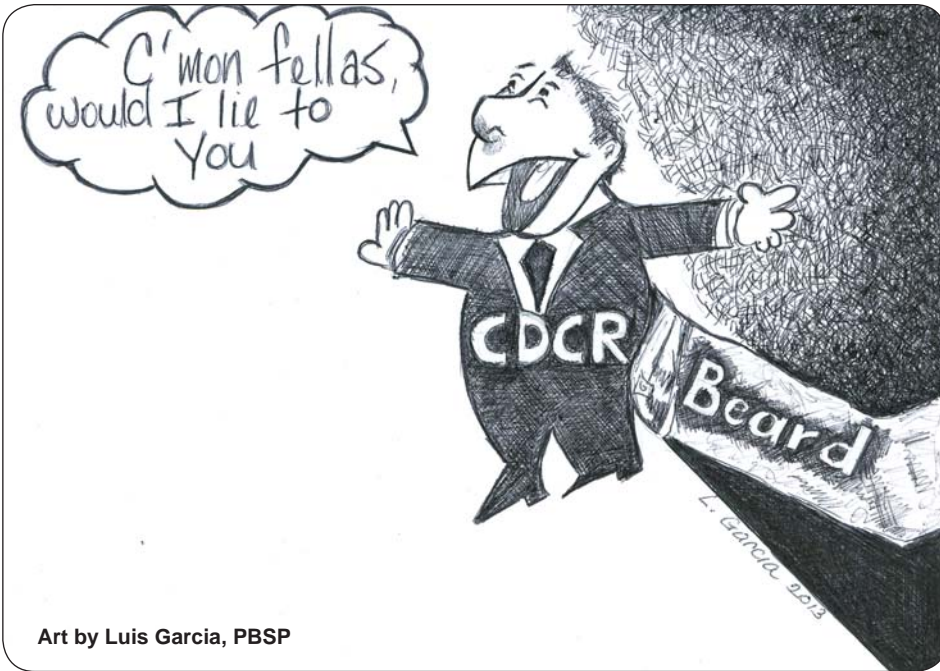
*Louis Brandeis, U.S. Supreme Court Justice*

"... the media in the United States effectively represents the interests of corporate America, and ... the media elite are the watchdogs of what constitutes acceptable ideological messages, the parameters of news and information content, and the general use of media resources."

*Peter Phillips, Project Censored*

"Many Americans hunger for a different kind of society -- one based on principles of caring, ethical and spiritual sensitivity, and communal solidarity. Their need for meaning is just as intense as their need for economic security."

*Michael Lerner, journalist*



Art by Luis Garcia, PBSP

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