

ROCK

★ Working to Extend Democracy to All ★

★ Volume 1, Number 6 ★

★ June #2 2012 ★

THE RED ONION HUNGER STRIKE

Men at Red Onion State Prison in Virginia are not only refusing meals but also refusing showers and refusing recreation time. We must support these courageous comrades who are actively revolting against the incarceration nation. Go to <http://virginiaprisonstrike.blogspot.com> and take action!

Solidarity Statement with Red Onion Hunger Strike

Students Against Mass Incarceration (SAMI) at Howard University extends our solidarity to the prisoners on hunger strike in Red Onion State Prison. As Black students, we understand that the inhumane conditions of solitary confinement experienced by our incarcerated brothers is an extension of the brutality suffered by Black people since our forced transportation to the Western Hemisphere. A direct line can be drawn to the daily abuses experienced by Africans during enslavement and the convict lease system to the Red Onion Hunger strikers.

Similar to other social justice movements, the Red Onion Hunger strikers simply want their human rights observed. Simple demands such as 'we demand fully cooked food' and 'adequate medical care' speak to the gross human rights violations that occur on a daily basis at Red Onion and prisons around the country. For example, Charles Graner, the ringleader of the abuses that took place in Abu Ghraib, was a correctional officer in Pennsylvania state and county prisons. This is why in October of last year, UN special rapporteur Jaun Mendez stated "solitary confinement should be banned by States as a punishment or extortion technique." We agree.

As historically conscious Black students, we remember the state violence experienced by Black students in Fisk University (1924) and Jackson State (1970). At any moment, it could be any one of Us. Free'em All!

Prisoners' Stories

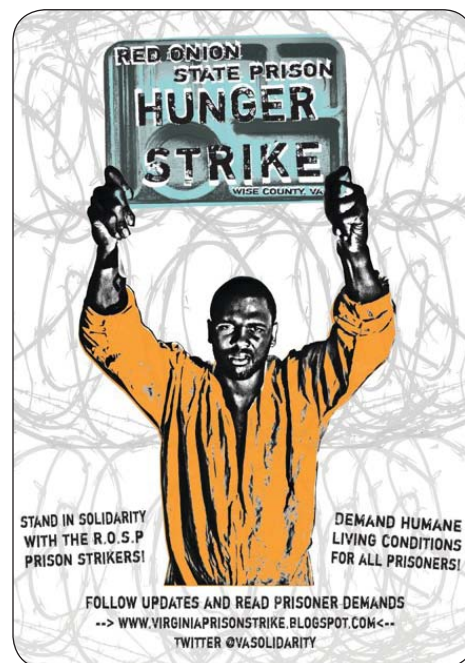
Stories from incarcerated brothers at Red Onion State Prison. More to come.

"It is so hard and bad for me that I had to tell my family to cancel sending me money for me and not put any more money on my account because the DOC would actually steal most of my money what my family work so hard for. That's why for right now I am on the DOC indigent inmate list..... You know that people judges you wrong by looking at you from the outside and don't look on the inside from your heart, mind , and soul. I'm not like that. I love people for who they are as human beings..... Kidnapped me from my homeland (Virgin Islands-prisoners are shipped to VA to fill our institutions). It was never due process of the law.....It happen late in the night when I was asleep . When the prison official come to my celland took me straight to a jet..." c.

"Also the guy who attacked me with the dog, his father is a captain here. Once the law suit is filed the asst. warden and the guy that attacked me with the dog will be named in it as well as all the guards that stood around and watched it happen. Once that hits the courts and it is public knowledge I expect the harassment to come. I'm ready for it. You know I cannot let go what these criminals did to me. I already feel ashamed because I did not physically fight back. It was probably best that I did

not fight back because those savages would have tried to kill me." j.

"...As I stepped outside the chow hall officer C. called out to officer R. saying "Hey, here goes one of those smart ass Muslims." Then C. told me to turn around so I could be searched. As I turned around C. and R. jumped on me slamming me to the ground face first. To make a long story short, C. ground my face into the concrete with his knees pulling skin off both sides of my face. He kneed me in the back of my head busting my lips on the concrete and knocking one of my teeth so loose that it had to be pulled. My shoulders and arms were scarred up from the concrete. C, was on my back with one arm pinned under my body. Instead of letting the pressure off my back so that my arm could be freed C. pulled my arm from under my body pulling skin and meat off my left wrist. The shackles were



put on my feet backwards and so tight it left scars on my legs because I was forced to walk that way under the threat of being assaulted again. I was given four bogus institutional charges to justify being attacked. After I handcuffed and shackled by C. and R. and support staff, R. punched me in my face and both C. and R. called me a “fucking nigger” several times.” p.

“The day I arrived I was...told that I was at Red Onion now and if I act up they would kill me and there was nothing anyone could or would do about it.”

If you haven't read Human Rights Watch's report, “Red Onion State Prison: Super Maximum Security Confinement in Virginia”, now's this time. ♦

NYC YOUTH AND STUDENTS PICKET IN SOLIDARITY WITH THE VA PRISON HUNGER STRIKE

**“R-O-S-P is on strike!
N-Y-C says fight, fight, fight!”
“1-2-3-4, open up the prison doors!
5-6-7-8, liberate Red Onion State!”**

On Friday, May 25, students at the City University of New York (CUNY) and others in NYC participated in an informational picket in downtown Manhattan to build support for the prisoner hunger strike at Red Onion State Prison (ROSP) in Virginia. Prisoners at ROSP began their strike on Tuesday, May 22 to demand basic human rights and an end to torture in the form of indefinite solidarity confinement.

Several students carried a large banner that read, “Victory to the Virginia Prison Hunger Strike! Turn Every Prison into a Trench of Heroic Struggle!” Others distributed copies of the prisoners' press release published when the strike began on Tuesday, as well as the strikers' list of ten demands, with a link to the website of the solidarity committee in VA: virginiaprisonstrike.blogspot.com. Chants rang out on the street in lower Manhattan, as many pedestrians and drivers in cars took the printed materials.

Addressing the gathered supporters, a

Co-Chair of the Revolutionary Student Coordinating Committee (RSCC) said, “People in prison are our brothers and sisters, mothers and fathers, our cousins, our family members, they are our people. And we must support them in their struggle for liberation.” RSCC is a student group based in CUNY that mobilized its membership for the action. Individuals from several different organizations also came out to support the picket and spoke about the need to struggle against the mass incarceration of working and oppressed people.

As the hunger strike moves into Day 5, we must continue to support the heroic struggle of the ROSP hunger strikers through phone calls, emails, the Change.org petition, op-ed articles, pickets, and other mass actions. Keep spreading the word! Seize the time! ♦

Ten Demands of ROSP Hunger Strikers

We (Prisoners at Red Onion State Prison) demand the right to an adequate standard of living while in the custody of the state!

1. We demand fully cooked food, and access to a better quality of fresh fruit and vegetables. In addition, we demand increased portions on our trays, which allows us to meet our basic nutritional needs as defined by VDOC regulations.

2. We demand that every prisoner at ROSP have unrestricted access to complaint and grievance forms and other paperwork we may request.

3. We demand better communication between prisoners and higher-ranking guards. Presently higher-ranking guards invariably take the lower-ranking guards'

side in disputes between guards and prisoners, forcing the prisoner to act out in order to be heard. We demand that higher-ranking guards take prisoner complaints and grievances into consideration without prejudice.

4. We demand an end to torture in the form of indefinite segregation through the implementation of a fair and transparent process whereby prisoners can earn the right to be released from segregation. We demand that prison officials completely adhere to the security point system, insuring that prisoners are transferred to institutions that correspond with their particular security level.

5. We demand the right to an adequate standard of living, including access to quality materials that we may use to clean our own cells. Presently, we are forced to clean our entire cell, including the inside of our toilets, with a single sponge and our bare hands. This is unsanitary and promotes the spread of disease-carrying bacteria.

6. We demand the right to have 3rd party neutral observers visit and document the condition of the prisons to ensure an end to the corruption amongst prison officials and widespread human rights abuses of prisoners. Internal Affairs and Prison Administrator's monitoring of prison conditions have not alleviated the dangerous circumstances we are living under while in custody of the state which include, but are not limited to: the threat of undue physical aggression by guards, sexual abuse and retaliatory measures, which violate prison policies and our human rights.

7. We demand to be informed of any and all changes to VDOC/IOP policies as soon as these changes are made.



8. We demand the right to adequate medical care. Our right to medical care is guaranteed under the eight amendment of the constitution, and thus the deliberate indifference of prison officials to our medical needs constitutes a violation of our constitutional rights. In particular, the toothpaste we are forced to purchase in the prison is a danger to our dental health and causes widespread gum disease and associated illnesses.

9. We demand our right as enumerated through VDOC policy, to a monthly haircut. Presently, we have been denied haircuts for nearly three months. We also demand to have our razors changed out on a weekly basis. The current practice of changing out the razors every three weeks leaves prisoners exposed to the risk of dangerous infections and injury.

10. We demand that there be no reprisals for any of the participants in the Hunger Strike. We are simply organizing in the interest of more humane living conditions. ♦

Press Release

On Tuesday May 22 as many as 45 prisoners at Red Onion State Prison, comprising at least 2 segregation pods, will enter the first day of a hunger strike protesting deplorable conditions in the prison and ongoing abuses by prison staff. For the men participating in the strike this is their only recourse to get Red Onion warden Randy Mathena to officially recognize their grievances and make immediate changes to food, sanitation and basic living conditions at the prison.

Supporters from DC and Virginia along with prisoner family members will hold a press conference at 11 AM in front of the VA Department of Corrections, in Richmond at 6900 Atmore Dr., to urge Warden Mathena, the Virginia Department of Corrections under Harold Clarke, Governor Bob McDonnell, state Senators Mark Warner and Jim Webb and other state and congressional legislators to act on behalf of justice and human rights.

A statement released by one of the hunger strike representatives said, "Regardless of sexual preference, gang affiliation, race and religion, there are only two classes at this prison: the oppressor and the oppressed. We the oppressed are coming together. We're considered rival gang members, but now we're coming together as revolutionaries. We're tired of being treated like animals." ♦

ON CONTENT AND FORM

A Proposal to the H.S. Leadership

"Whoever doesn't find a way to struggle against this situation is destroyed—the situation controls him and not the other way around."

The Red Army Faction, 1975

By C. Landrum

It is necessary to understand that the universe and its innumerable forms of matter are in ceaseless flux and ever-changing. Therefore if we are to formulate an accurate analysis of our circumstances, we must first begin with the recognition that technically speaking, reality does not consist of "things", but of processes and endless transformations.

All form is the outward manifestation and the appearance of a given object or process. And in fact, form is a symptomatic pathology of an "essentially" deeper content from which form follows. In the essence and form of any object or process are not separate aspects that are mechanically juxtaposed one alongside the other, but are the interpenetrating characteristics inherent of all phenomena and in many cases perceptually indistinguishable. As V.I. Lenin said, "Essence appears phenomenally, phenomenon is essential."

Much like the cover of a book, the essence of its content is only partially revealed in the written summary and title of its outside cover. We are restrained and drawing accurate conclusions based exclusively upon their formal manifestations and their external appearances.

The full essential content of the book itself, and is driving force of internal contradictions, can only be revealed within its pages.

And although essence is not fully revealed on the surface, it is nonetheless for the most part, the dominating and decisive factor that determines the overall direction and development of a given phenomenon. And as the driving force of any given phenomenon — organic, inorganic, social phenomenon, even our current struggle to end the state's campaign of social extermination — the goal of both all science and philosophy is, as Marx wrote, "to reveal essence, the internal, deep and underlying process behind the multitude of phenomena, outward sides and features of reality."

In order to furnish a solution to any dilemma, a correct interpretation of reality is required. And this necessitates the application of dialectical materialism. Having said that despite the reciprocal influence that both form and essence exert upon the other and their mutual development as one, we must recognize form for what it is — a side effect manifesting from an essential source.

Our current struggle — as tactics currently exist — is objectively incorrect. A true "qualitative" transformation, such as an end to our perpetual isolation and the social extermination resulting from it, can only come from an "essential" transformation, not a "formal" one.

The validation process is a side effect, the manifestation of an essential source of oppression — the SHU. And so long as we continue to focus our struggle on the validation process (and the five commands which also address the formal effects of the SHU) while allowing the primary source of our essential oppression to remain intact as it is — the SHU facilities — the state will continue to manufacture pseudo-justifications and illegitimate security threats to isolate us indefinitely.

We must adhere to dialectical materialism's and its teachings that the basis of change comes not from those external forces and influences outside of a given phenomenon but within it.

External forces and influences can only create conditions necessary for transformation. In our current circumstances, the states increasingly oppressive practices are the contradictions necessary for transformation. It is up to us to cultivate a collective consciousness of resistance and transform the SHU as it currently exists from within the SHU itself, if we are to end our perpetual isolation.

It has been said before that we are "social animals". This is an essential truth, not an empty cliché. It is inherent within our DNA and coded in our genes — literally! We must feed, clothe, procreate, and shelter ourselves, requiring that we also cooperate, organize, and coordinate our labor, and this necessitates various degrees of "social intercourse" between us. It is in the process of social intercourse that we develop our individual personalities as distinct identities defining us as uniquely human. Yes, we are truly social animals.

The group expresses itself through the individual and each individual is shaped and molded by the groups multiple individuals. Both the collective and the individual cre-

ate the conditions for the other's existence in an inseparable struggle of reciprocity, where each influences the development of the other, as one whole. Marx captured this dialectical relationship in his observation

“the human being is not merely a gregarious animal, but an animal which can individuate itself only in the midst of society ... And isolated individual outside society ... Is as much of an absurdity as the development of language without individuals living together.” (*Grundrisse*)

To isolate us indefinitely is to artificially separate us from the collective and deprive us of the social conditions necessary to develop our identities as distinct individual social beings. It is a process of dehumanization. To elevate our political consciousness to a level necessary in order to wage a successful struggle, it must be understood that a campaign against indefinite isolation is a campaign against “social extermination.” Long-term isolation is a state method of assassination while keeping us alive as living, breathing, biological individuals.

We must comprehend that the prison system is a microcosm of the economic and social inequalities inherent within society itself. It is a political – economic phenomenon.

For those of us who have endured years of sensory deprivation have been denied our identities. At this stage are only means to develop our identity is to develop a political identity forged in a context of a political struggle to end our indefinite isolation and achieve social intercourse.

I do *not* propose that we abandon our current five commands, but that we recognize their “formal” character and understand that the validation process and the five commands are side effects manifesting from an “essential” source — the SHU as it currently exists.

So long as the SHU exists, the C. D. C. will subject us to perpetual isolation, whether under the guise of validation STG, program failure, etc., or any other creative pseudo-justification the state prisoncrats conveniently manufacture.

As we know, the basis of all change and his transformation is internal. We must not only attack the SHU itself as a source of our “social extermination”, we must transform it from “within”. I *propose* that we demand, and struggle for, “association” in groups of no less than eight. “Association” as a means to implement social intercourse for the healthy psychological development

of the individual. Our identities would be facilitated with our right to cellies according to the same criteria and frequency that general population receives them, the installation of two (four – man) tables in each pod, along with a phone, and one tear out for day-room at a time.

A concrete transformation of the SHU itself would render all of the state's excuses for confining us permanently, obsolete. Transforming the validation process *alone*, will only result in a new excuse to permanently isolate us, so long as the SHU facilities exist as they currently do. We must transform them. For

This may seem out of reach, but not only is it a potential reality, “association” is a tried and tested tactic that is been achieved on various occasions by politically conscious prisoners subjected to isolation and sensory deprivation units.

Our struggle for the five commands must continue forward unabated on both the domestic and international fronts. Although our primary struggle must be for the realization of Association if we are to achieve essential transformation. At this stage, we cannot afford to fail, which calls into question our particular tactics and the possibility of [peaceful and lawful yet] drastic actions. ♦

PLANTATIONS, PRISONS AND PROFITS

By Charles M. Blow

That paragraph opens a devastating eight-part series published this month by The Times-Picayune of New Orleans about how the state's largely private prison system profits from high incarceration rates and tough sentencing, and how many with the power to curtail the system actually have a financial incentive to perpetuate it.

The picture that emerges is one of convicts as chattel and a legal system essentially based on human commodification.

First, some facts from the series:

- One in 86 Louisiana adults is in the prison system, which is nearly double the national average.

- More than 50 percent of Louisiana's inmates are in local prisons, which is more than any other state. The next highest state is Kentucky at 33 percent. The national average is 5 percent.

- Louisiana leads the nation in the percentage of its prisoners serving life without parole.

- Louisiana spends less on local inmates than any other state.

- Nearly two-thirds of Louisiana's prisoners are nonviolent offenders. The national average is less than half.

In the early 1990s, the state was under a federal court order to reduce overcrowding, but instead of releasing prisoners or loosening sentencing guidelines, the state incentivized the building of private prisons. But, in what the newspaper called “a uniquely Louisiana twist,” most of the prison entrepreneurs were actually rural sheriffs. They saw a way to make a profit and did.

It also was a chance to employ local people, especially failed farmers forced into bankruptcy court by a severe drop in the crop prices.

But in order for the local prisons to remain profitable, the beds, which one prison operator in the series distastefully refers to as “honey holes,” must remain full. That means that on almost a daily basis, local prison officials are on the phones bartering for prisoners with overcrowded jails in the big cities.

It also means that criminal sentences must remain stiff, which the sheriff's association has supported. This has meant that Louisiana has some of the stiffest sentencing guidelines in the country. Writing bad checks in Louisiana can earn you up to 10 years in prison. In California, by comparison, jail time would be no more than a year.

There is another problem with this unsavory system: prisoners who wind up in these local for-profit jails, where many of the inmates are short-timers, get fewer rehabilitative services than those in state institutions, where many of the prisoners are lifers. That is because the per-diem per prisoner in local prisons is half that of state prisons.

In short, the system is completely backward.

Lifers at state prisons can learn to be welders, plumbers or auto mechanics — trades many will never practice as free men — while prisoners housed in local prisons, and are certain to be released, gain no skills and leave jail with nothing more than “\$10 and a bus ticket.”

These ex-convicts, with almost no rehabilitation and little prospect for supporting themselves, return to the already-struggling communities that were rendered that way in part because so many men are being

extracted on such a massive scale. There the cycle of crime often begins again, with innocent people caught in the middle and impressionable young eyes looking on.

According to The Times-Picayune: "In five years, about half of the state's ex-convicts end up behind bars again."

This suits the prison operators just fine. They need them to come back to the "honey holes."

Furthermore, the more money the state spends on incarceration, the less it can spend on preventive measures like education. (According to Education Week's State Report Cards, Louisiana was one of three states and the District of Columbia to receive an F for K-12 achievement in 2012, and, this year, the state, over all, is facing a \$220 million deficit in its \$25 billion budget.)

Louisiana is the starkest, most glaring example of how our prison policies have failed. It showcases how private prisons do not serve the public interest and how the mass incarceration as a form of job creation is an abomination of justice and civility and creates a long-term crisis by trying to create a short-term solution.

As the paper put it: "A prison system that leased its convicts as plantation labor in the 1800s has come full circle and is again a nexus for profit." ♦

Quote Box

"As the centers of American power were seized and hijacked by corporations, the media continued to pay deference to systems of power that could no longer be considered honest or democratic. The media treat criminals on Wall Street as responsible members of the ruling class. They treat the criminals in the White House and the Pentagon as statesmen."

- Chris Hedges

"And say, finally, whether peace is best preserved by giving energy to the government or information to the people. This last is the most legitimate engine of government. Educate and inform the whole mass of people. Enable them to see that it is their interest to preserve peace and order, and they will preserve them. And it requires no very high degree of education to convince them of this. They are the only sure reliance for the preservation of our liberty."

Thomas Jefferson - (1743-1826),
US Founding Father

SOLIDARITY FROM CALIPATRIA ASU

Greetings. First and foremost I would like to extend our utmost love and respects to all who remain strong and positive in their situation and in our situation as one against CDCR's death grip of long-term segregation.

It has been 8 months since the last Pelican Bay-CA Statewide Hunger Strike and there has been some "material changes" here at Calipatria ASU. These "material changes" consist of us being allowed an appliance and the augmentation of canteen items to our list. I emphasize on these being "material changes" because these are things we've had coming for years. Yet, we had to add these items to our own demands here and starve ourselves.

Although we were given these "items" and it appears to be a move in the positive direction, one must remember that we had these "items" coming, but Calipatria's Administration was depriving us of this. This is like patching up a bullet-hole wound by using a band-aid.

In a recent letter to the "ROCK" newsletter (June Issue) an individual wrote that "we won" here in ASU because we got our T.V.'s That's a big misstatement! Our objective as a "whole" is to see an end to all wrongful validations and long-term segregation/isolation. We all support the men at Pelican Bay State Prison-Short Corridor and the 5 Core Demands. Not only do they apply to them and the SHUs, by they apply to all of us. As the old saying goes "United We Stand, Divided We Fall". We've been through two Hunger Strikes in solidarity with Pelican Bay State Prison and will continue to be as one in unity if another takes place.

Where there has been "material changes" here, there have been NO real changes at Pelican Bay. It took a man to die here for us to be taken seriously and get our voices heard. His death was due to his solitary confinement that brought him mental anguish beyond his control. This is the type of psychological warfare that CDCR is waging against us. Till this day we are still fighting against their tactics that break the mind, body, and soul.

We are all secluded from the outside world which limits our voices to travel. It's our wives, our families, our loved ones, who speak our minds and lets the public know that we are and have been living through torturous inhumane conditions.

This has had an extreme impact on all men of every race, who are living their lives in "long-term" segregation with their loved ones who they can't hug, touch, and for most, even see. Yet, to mock our situation, we are told that we must either "parole, die, or debrief" in order to get out of this dungeon. Three men have died during the struggle thus far, and if change for ALL everywhere in these torture dungeons doesn't come soon, CDCR is going to have a lot to answer for when more men are left to die for what they believe is right.

"The ultimate test of man's conscience may be his willingness to sacrifice something today for future generations whose words of thanks will not be heard."

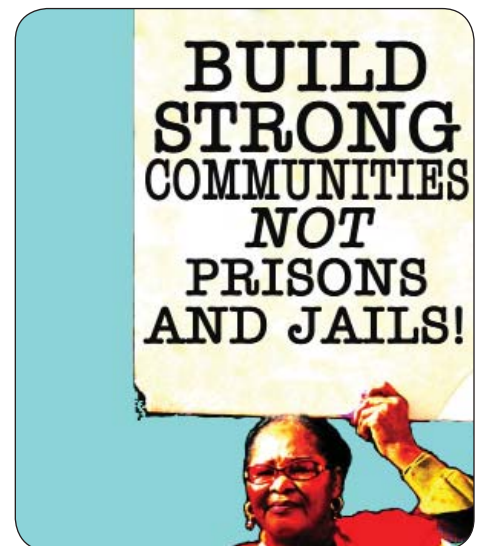
- Gaylord Nelson

Respectfully,

Robbie Riva, CDC# T-49359, Calipatria State Prison ASU, written on 5-28-2012

[Ed's Note: I could not find the letter in *Rock* referred to in the June issue or any earlier issues. But in the TidBits section of issue #4 (May) there was a reprint from the HS Support Mailing List in which a Calipatria ASU prisoner discussed getting televisions. I found no reference to any statement "we won", although he did say the "Next step is getting them out of that hellhole of segregation...." The purpose of his letter was to thank the outside folks for their support. In any event, we are all agreed the five core demands are first and foremost.

I urge readers to call my attention to any misstatements of fact or inaccuracies in *Rock*, as I do make mistakes. In the last issue I had to cross out by hand a statement that there would be a new HS on July 1st. That bad information came from Mary at the *S.F. Bay View*, who said she got it from one of the prisoner reps.]



LETTERS

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

Legal Question

Greeting! Just wanted to send my gratitude and respects to Ed, HS Reps, NCTT, and all other organizations and individuals who are putting time and effort to keep the ball rolling. With that said, I wanted to put a quick broadcast to the HS Reps, NCTT and any other savvy individuals who are up to par on litigation. As you recall they imposed new changes to (PC) 2933.6 in 2010, which changed SHU inmates credit earning from 1/3 to 0 credit earning. It's no question that this was just another ploy to keep us in the SHU and in solitary longer. There's a handful of us here with dates and we have no litigators in the vicinity to help us with a petition. We were all validated prior to this new change in 2010 and would like to know if anybody has had success overturning it? Is so, we'd highly appreciate it if you could point us in the right direction with some case laws to look up or maybe even a spare copy of a petition concerning this issue we could use as a guide.

Gracias for your time and saludos atodos.

Richard Medina,

Pelican Bay State Prison - SHU

Thanks

First and foremost, I want to thank you for your voice, thoughts, experience and opinion concerning everything that has and is taking place in California prisons. I don't have the education nor do I possess the vocabulary to adequately express myself, but I do recognize that you're of another caliber and what an actual convict once was. I have not found a single flaw with the logic in your editorials on how to fight for and improve the lives and conditions of prisoners, and you've done more to educate the prison population than anyone here. I hope you will continue to agitate, agitate, agitate until the day you leave the planet earth.

Name Withheld,

Pelican Bay State Prison - SHU

[**Ed's Response:** Prisoners send me a lot of letters like the one above, and they are appreciated. Yet the letters I like best are those that are critical, as they point out things I may be doing incorrectly—areas in which I can improve.]

SDP is a Joke

I just want to thank you for the June issue of *Rock*. The cover story was informative but very disappointing. After two statewide hunger strikes and all the media attention we brought to the issue concerning SHU conditions and CDCR's gang validation policy, you'd think we would have achieved a lot more. What happened to BPSP-SHU's five demands?! The step down program (SDP) is a joke!! The so called new strategy for validating prisoners won't fix the problem; in fact it's going to make things worse. With the new security threat group (STG) label it's going to make it easier for CDCR to validate people and place them in the SHU for their four years step down program (SDP). If you think these changes don't affect you directly, think again!!! Because this new strategy will allow CDCR to validate just about anyone, even those of you who are not members or associates to a prison gang (labeled). Let's not sell ourselves short or accept anything less than the five core demands, and let's finish what we started.

Name withheld,

Calipatria ASU

On Torture

[**Ed's Note:** *The following letter was six single-spaced pages. In the process of typing this handwritten letter it was necessary for me to edit out many paragraphs. I have tried not to remove too much of the author's meaning in the process. If you see error they are mine, not the author's.*]

The first issue of *Rock* was both well received and timely. "The Road Ahead" is an essential and critical starting point in our struggle for justice. We must first exercise our minds, and expand our understanding of what is really going on. Objectivity and critical thinking, as well as analysis, is fundamental.

Daulo Freire once said, "the great humanistic and historical task of the oppressed [is] to liberate themselves and their oppressors as well. The oppressor, who oppress, exploit, and rape by virtue of their power cannot find in this power the strength to liberate either the oppressed or themselves. Only the power that springs from the weakness of the oppressed will be sufficiently strong to free [you]."

It has often been said that power corrupts, but it is perhaps equally important to realize that weakness, too, corrupts. Power corrupts the few, while weakness corrupts

the many. Hatred, malice, rudeness, intolerance, and suspicion are fruits of weakness. The resentment of the weak does not spring from any injustice done to them, but from the sense of their inadequacy and importance. Sharing of wealth cannot win the weak over to the other side. They will feel it as a form of oppression, nor can they win the weak by sharing their hope, pride, or even their hatred. The only way to win is through the capacity for self-help of the oppressed. They need the technical, social, and political skills which would enable them to get bread, human dignity, freedom, and strength by their own efforts. This is liberation. This is power.

We know that ideas and words have significance, they are preludes to action. Words, ideas are a means to an end. Words cannot move mountains but they can move the multitude. Men are more ready to fight and die for a word than for anything else. Words shape our thoughts, stir feelings, and beget action. They kill and revive, corrupt and cure.

Torture (in CIA language "coercive interrogation") is a set of techniques designed to put prisoners into a state of deep disorientation and shock in order for them to make concessions against their will. Two CIA manuals were declassified in the late 1990s. These manuals explain the way to break "resistant sources" is to create violent ruptures between prisoners and their ability to make sense of the world around them. First the senses are starved of any input (hoods, earplugs, shackles, total isolation, etc.), Then the body is bombarded with overwhelming stimulation (lights, beatings, etc.).

The goal of this "softening up" stage is to provoke a kind of hurricane in the mind. Prisoners are so regressed and afraid that they can no longer think rationally or protect their own interests. It is in that state of shock that most prisoners give their interrogators whatever they want — information, confessions, a renunciation of former beliefs and so on (sound familiar?).

The torturers understand the importance of solidarity. And they set out to shock that impulse of social interconnectedness out of the prisoners. Of course all interrogation is purportedly about gaining valuable infor-

Letters Continued on page 9

LETTER TO ROCK

[Ed's Opening Note: The following document was hand written and some of it was difficult for my lone eyeball to read. I've tried to use context or to otherwise guessimate the items I could not quite decipher. With that said, here's the article.]

"The way prisons are run and their inmates treated give a faithful picture of a society, especially of the ideas and methods of those who dominate that society. Prisons indicate the distance to which government and social conscience have come in their concern and respect for the human being."

Milouan Hiilas

By Michael (Zahaaribu) Dorrough

We felt in necessary, unfortunately, to respond to certain criticism because of its incorrectness. And also to clarify what our position is and always has been in our respect for and support of the voice of representation of the five core demands at Pelican Bay. Bro. Ed's response to that criticism [Vol. 1 #4, p. 4] was right on point and requires no further elaboration from us.

It has always been understood, respected and supported by us, by all of us, that the voice of representation concerning these issues is exclusively at Pelican Bay. And more importantly, Pelican Bay is very much aware of the work we are trying to do, and that it is a part of the protracted struggle that must be waged.

Our activities are natural outgrowths of our support and respect for the central organizers of the California prisoners hunger strike, Todd Asker, Paul Redd, Arturo Castellanos, Antonia Guillen, Danny Troxell, and Sitawa Nantambu Jamaa (s/n Ronnie Dewberry) who is chairman of the N.C.T.T. which is based at Pelican Bay.

There was also a criticism of a failure to present practical solutions that can unite all prisoners—the stratification of the prisoners class. While it may be true that we have not addressed this specific issue in any great detail, it is not true that this issue has not been addressed. There have been articles written in the *San Francisco Bay View* and discussions on prisoner unity were had by the central organizers of the California prisoners' hunger strike. Abllul Olwgbala Shakur (s/n J. Harvey) of the Bunchy Carter Institute for Revolutionary Change and Mutope Duguma (s/n James D. Crawford), both at Pelican Bay short Corridor, have

written on the subject. In the March issue of *Rock* an article was featured titled "The Road Ahead and The Dialectics of Change" by C.L. (a California prisoner) with an introduction by Ed Mead. As well as a letter to the H.S. Solidarity coalition by Todd Ashker that was really brilliant.

Also included in the May issue of *Rock* was a beautiful example of what the men at Calipatria ASU were able to accomplish.

Stratification of the imprisoned is only a reflection of the stratification of the race, caste and economic class system of capitalist American society at large. However, the primary solution to many of the concerns lies in the examples of unity that have been set throughout the prison system (and inspired by Pelican Bay) over the past ten months, and in particular in the SHU and Ad Seg units where men have had to continue to fight in the wake of retaliation, and to improve conditions in their immediate spaces.

Solutions, what does and does not work is about the extent and context in which we understand a situation that we are faced with, developing strategies and tactics based on that understanding that might give us the best chance to succeed, and acting on it and not giving up.

As was mentioned, there really have been an abundance of examples of solutions that have been shown and discussed over the past ten months that does take up the issue, the stratification of the prisoner class.

The question was asked, "Does the N.C.T.T. have any practical solutions that do away with the social stratification of the prisoner class and divisional segments?" (i.e., general population, segregation-SHU-ASU status, Sensitive Needs Yards). Specifically, as it relates to Sensitive Needs/PC Yards, no, we don't have any solutions, practical or otherwise. Though we acknowledge, and it has been described in detail on numerous occasions elsewhere, how the state intentionally manufactures divisions and animosities among imprisoned lumpen groups to maintain ease in control and prevent broad-based cooperation and political development. There is a significant segment of prisoners who choose to separate themselves either consciously/actively or unconsciously/passively from the broader prison class, and align themselves with the state. These broken males chose to abandon the general population for the protective custody of the state. Regardless of their circumstances, no matter how dire, a choice between death and serving the in-

terests of one's oppressor is still a choice.¹ Just as all of us who took up the hunger strike walked toward possible and actual death to oppose the interests of the state in maintaining these torture units made a choice. Can truly principled men expect any less from others they plan to unify with? Of course not, and no reasoning person would consider otherwise.

"We should never accept being abused or mistreated. It's our duty as human beings to fully resist. Our hunger strike activity over the past year has shown that solid resistance is not only possible, but also very effective. And it can be done in smart, fully advantageous ways. It simply requires prisoners to come together collectively for the common good of all and with the support of the people outside, forming the strength to force changes that are long overdue.

"Our compliance with and recognition of the prison's power of us is our downfall. If we collectively refuse to comply, and refuse to recognize the prisoncrats having any power over us via refusal to work, refusal to follow orders, then these prisons cannot operate." (Excerpt from a letter written by Todd Ashker to the *San Francisco Bay View* Feb. 29, reprinted in March 2012 *Rock*). Our only solution, as overwhelming as it may seem, is to launch a protracted campaign of resistance throughout the prison system (level three and four yards) not only to close the SHU facilities down completely, but to gain back everything we've given up over the years. The time for us to get off our knees is long overdue.

"With the application of new and correct tactics employed through the system, accompanied by class action 602/502s and lawsuits, coordinated written statements from us to the media and support from various prison activist groups and of greatest significance, mass solidarity, we can achieve this. The legal struggle that was being waged in the interest of the entire population to overturn the validation process failed to provoke a unified response. We are, as a prison population, oppressed as an entire population.

Therefore the solution is to be found in

1. Editor's Note: Let us also not ignore our (GP prisoners') role in creating the need for SNY and PC yards. It's a two way street.

a group response.

“We as a prison population are becoming increasingly more self-centered and driven by self-interest as our material conditions continue to deteriorate. In turn we become contributors and accomplices to CDCR’s agendas and to the further downward spiral of our own deterioration. More often than not we do so unconsciously, that is, we do so unintentionally and unknowingly.

“We live within circumstances where the existing and predominate ideology of individualism is self-defeating and destructive to all of us as a population, and where the collective mentality is an absolute necessity for the improvement of our living conditions.” From ‘The Road Ahead and The Dialectics of Change’ by C.L. (a California prisoner).”

And finally, hundreds of men in the ASU at Calipatria State Prison participated last year in the Pelican Bay State Prison hunger strike that reached statewide in July 2011 and another in September 2011.

The men at Calipatria State Prison ASU who starved themselves were in unity with Pelican Bay State Prison’s five core demands, but these men added their own demands which were to have appliances (either a TV or radio) to stimulate their minds if they had to be forced to stay in segregation. With the help from articles that were published to expose the illegal extended years these men are serving the “temporary” segregation units. Loved ones on the other side of these walls pushed CDCR to have these men’s demands met for appliances. The men at Calipatria State Prison ASU expressed to the public their extreme inhuman conditions they were faced with, and, after warden Leland McEwen at Calipatria State Prison was removed, Sacramento approved televisions for all men in Calipatria’s ASU. “On April 19, 2012, at the expense of CDCR, TVs were distributed/installed in all ASU cells” From TidBits, *Rock*, May 2012 issue.

Quoting these excerpts was necessary, we believe, for one reason only, to demonstrate that the issue of addressing the need for prisoners’ unity, of specific examples of solutions and the importance of developing a political consciousness and its role in developing successful strategies and tactics inside and outside of prison has in fact been a part of the dialogue. Whether or not anything could only be a superfluous gran-

diose presentation of a non-existent movement has yet to be determined and is really not the point. The success of any struggle is tied to the strength of its movement. A movement that we can all belong to as a result of our willingness to resist and make sacrifices for, in the name of a movement that does not benefit from antagonistic debates!

Unity requires dialogue and commitment, and our only interest is in broadening and deepening the unity and support that all of the efforts made has realized for us all.

Constructive criticism is the critical view or opinion based on observation, knowledge, investigation, propriety, insight and genuine concern. Perhaps this should be the criterion of any future criticism.

As revolutionaries/activists, we cannot be expected to act as something other than who and what we *all* are, and we cannot fall under the influences of mock polling systems. We will and must continue to pursue the formation of a broader “National Mass Movement” which will support the realization of the five core demands articulated by Pelican Bay. Just as we all strive to transform the nature and structure of capitalist society itself, which gave rise to the need to pursue the California prisoners hunger strike, and the Pelican Bay D-Corridor collective to create the five core demands.

Other areas that can be pursued are contacting attorneys Marilyn McMahon and Carol Strickman, the California Prison Focus (of which Ed Mead is an officer-member) who are part of the Hunger Strike Support coalition, if this has not already been done, and explain to them the circumstances of your situation. Write to your families and loved ones and make them aware of your situation and educate them to the prison movement as a whole. Identify areas of common interest in your space and organize a response.

Don’t work or go to canteen. The Prisoner Activist Resource Center (PARC), P.O. Box 70447, Oakland, CA 94612, is an invaluable resource.

And again, “The Road Ahead and the Dialectics of Change” in the March 2012 issue of *Rock* is excellent study material to refer to and other examples referred to in an effort to avoid the problem of having legitimate dialogue that is intended to further the cause be reduced to who and what we are. We will simply end this. Struggling with you. ♣

THE PRISON CELL

The Barrios Unidos Prison Project is constructing a prison cell that can be utilized to teach and inform diverse segments of the population: youth, judges, educators, policy makers, and community members. In constructing an interactive prison cell, we hope to bring insight and awareness on the realities of incarceration. It will provide an opportunity for individuals to step into the environment, giving a sense of what it is like to be incarcerated. We hope to encourage people to support alternatives to incarceration policy and legislation.



The model will be a traveling interactive replica of a prison cell and visiting room. We plan on bringing the model to schools, universities, courthouses, conferences, and other educational events. It will include literature on the consequences of incarceration, prison policy, the prison industrial complex, alternatives to incarceration, the economics of incarceration, as well other pertinent information and statistics. Not only will participants be able to sit in the confines of the cell, to add to the sensory experience, the participants will hear audio recordings of the on-going, day-to-day sounds of prison life.

This project will provide realistic and alternative education to communities concerned with the rate of incarceration, the economic costs, and the imbalance of justice for those that cannot afford proper representation. ♣

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COMMUNICATION IS A HUMAN RIGHT

mation and therefore forcing betrayal. But many prisoners report that their torturers were far less interested in the information, which they usually already possessed, than in achieving the act of betrayal itself. The point of the exercise was getting the prisoners to do irreparable damage to that part of themselves that believes in helping others, above all else, that part of themselves that made them activists, replacing it with shame and humiliation. (Doesn't it sound like IGI/CDCR?)

In this context the ultimate act of rebellion, where small gestures of kindness between prisoners, such as tending to each other's wounds or sharing scarce food, when such loving acts were discovered, they were met with harsh punishment (as in the SHU, validations, chronos, etc.).

Prisoners were goaded into being as individualistic as possible, constantly offered Faustian bargains, like choosing between more unbearable torture for themselves or more torture for fellow prisoners (as in debriefing to get out of SHU, snitching on other prisoners, etc.). In some cases prisoners were so successfully broken that they agreed to hold the "picana" (prod), or go on TV (as those debriefers did during hunger strike at PBSP-SHU for the local news station Channel 9) and renounce their former beliefs. These prisoners represented the ultimate triumph for their torturers. Not only had the prisoners abandoned solidarity but in order to survive they destroyed themselves, and had succumbed to the cutthroat ethos of laissez-faire capitalism — looking out for number one.

What we also discover from these tactics is that direct physical brutality creates only resentment, hostility, and further defiance. Interrogatees who have withstood pain are more difficult to handle by other methods. The effect has not been to repress the subject but to restore his confidence and maturity. We know this to be true because the men on the short corridor, who have been isolation for decades on end, are more resilient than ever. Their integrity is intact, and these qualities are to be esteemed and emulated if the struggle is to be won.

The CIA manuals stressed the importance of cutting detainees off from anything that will help them establish a new narrative — their own sensory input, that from other prisoners, even communications with guards. Isolation, both physical and psychological, must be maintained from the moment of apprehension. The in-

terrogators know that prisoners talk, they warn each other about what's to come, they passed notes between the bars. Once that happens, the captors lose their edge. They still have the power to inflict bodily pain, but they have lost their most effective psychological tools to manipulate and break the prisoners. Confusion, disorientation, and surprise; without these elements there is no shock.

Memory, both individual and collective, turns out to be the greatest shock absorber of all. So let us remember these tactics that CDCR employs. Let us remember those men who have been subjected to these tortures of mind, spirit, and body from 10 to 30 years. Let us honor them for their strength and perseverance. Let us follow their example and resist.

There is a well-known phenomenon that hits people who have had a pinnacle experience, been the focus of attention, and do not have anything to follow through with, and don't have anything to throw their energies into. Once the experience ends they fall into a sort of post-partum depression. We cannot let this post hunger strike time period slip us into complacency. We must actively resist. "Self is the prison that can ever bind the soul." Resistance is a state of existence; it's a state of mind.

[This paragraph was omitted because it outlined specific acts of passive resistance SHU prisoners could engage in, and therefore could result in this issue of the newsletter being censored.]

If another hunger strike is ever initiated we should not be discouraged by a recent court ruling allowing prison administrators the right to force-feed prisoners on hunger strikes. Colin Dayar's book "The Law Is A White Dog" talks about prisoners at Guantanamo Bay. Coordinated mass hunger strikes, to which the military classified as "manipulative self-injurious behavior", peaked at 131 in December of 2005. And by 2006 the number dropped drastically after mobile restraint chairs were introduced, in which prisoners were force fed twice a day through nose tubes. If CDC employs forced feeding and the numbers are great, there is no reason to stop the hunger strike. We would just have some tangible physical discomfort or maybe even pain to go with the insidious mental anguish we experience in our minds daily from being in the SHU year after year. CDC will have no choice but to declare a state of emergency and either allow prisoners to die or force-feed us, which would shut down all programs and

make staff escort prisoners to medical for forced feeding. The more yms[?] The more work. The more work the more pressure. The more pressure, the more our voices will be heard. The longer it goes on the louder our voice. CDC could not allowed to go on and on. It would force them to make the changes we demand.

Those brave men who sacrificed their lives for our cause, and died for our struggle for justice during the HS deserve our commitment. CDC is responsible for their "suicide" for our cause. We cannot let their deaths be in vain. ♦

*In solidarity with PBHRM,
J. Angel Martinez, PBSP*

SUIT TARGETS SHU

A federal lawsuit filed Thursday [May 31st] seeks to end the prolonged use of solitary confinement in California, calling the practice cruel and unusual punishment.

The lawsuit was filed by the New York-based Center for Constitutional Rights, and lawyers want to pursue the case as a class-action on behalf of inmates at Pelican Bay State Prison who have been in solitary confinement for more than 10 years.

"The prolonged conditions of brutal confinement and isolation such as those at Pelican Bay have rightly been condemned as torture by the international community," said Jules Lobel, the center's president. "These conditions strip prisoners of their basic humanity and cross the line between humane treatment and barbarity."

The lawsuit said California's practices render the state "an outlier in this country and in the civilized world" by allowing an inmate to "languish, typically alone, in a cramped, concrete, windowless cell" for about 23 hours a day.

Earlier this year officials said they were reviewing their policies with an eye toward reducing the number of inmates in segregated housing units. The decision to place an inmate in segregated housing will be based more on their behavior in prison than just gang affiliation, said Jeffrey Callison, a spokesman for the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation.

In March, inmates and advocates asked the UN to investigate solitary confinement in California, which they called "torture." Inmates have also staged hunger strikes to protest prison conditions. ♦

LA Times

GREETINGS FROM THE CENTER FOR CONSTITUTIONAL RIGHTS (CCR):

I wanted to share information about an upcoming event in San Francisco titled, Solitary Confinement at Pelican Bay: A Panel Discussion. Our panel will discuss the use of solitary confinement in the U.S. criminal justice system, examining specifically the injustices surrounding the use of solitary confinement at Pelican Bay. The event will be held on Thursday, June 14th from 6:30 – 8:00 pm at the Women's Building (3543 18th St #8, San Francisco, CA).

We invite you to co-sponsor this event. As a co-sponsor we will list your organization on promotional material, including the CCR website, prior to the event and on materials that are provided to attendees at the event, including the program. We request that, as a co-sponsor, you help us do outreach in the San Francisco / Bay Area, inviting people to join the discussion and come to the event.

Additional details are available on our web page. Please let me know if you have any questions and kindly confirm your interest in co-sponsoring this event. ♦

MEDIA ADVISORY

Center for Constitutional Rights to Hold Press Call to Discuss Lawsuit Challenging Prolonged Solitary Confinement in California

CONTACT: Dorothee Benz, CCR, (212) 614-6480, press@ccrjustice.org, David Lerner, Riptide Communications, (212) 260-5000, david@riptidecommunications.com

On Thursday May 31, attorneys from the Center for Constitutional Rights (CCR) and others will host a press call with reporters to discuss their filing of a federal lawsuit against the State of California challenging the constitutionality of prolonged solitary confinement in the state's Secure Housing Unit (SHU) at Pelican Bay prison. The class-action suit

alleges that prolonged solitary confinement violates Eight Amendment prohibitions against cruel and unusual punishment, and that the absence of meaningful review for SHU placement violates the prisoners' right to due process. It is part of a larger movement for reform of inhumane conditions, sparked and dramatized by a hunger strike last year.

What: Press call to discuss filing with attorneys, advocates and plaintiffs' family members

Who: Jules Lobel, President for the Center for Constitutional Rights, Alexis Agathocleous, Center for Constitutional Rights Staff Attorney, Marie Levin, family member of Pelican Bay SHU prisoner, Dorsey Nunn, Executive Director, Legal Services for Prisoner's with Children, Marilyn McMahon, Executive Director, California Prison Focus.

When: Thursday, May 31, 2012, 10 a.m. PDT / 1 p.m. EDT.

Call info: Toll-Free Access Number: 1.800.868.1837 Direct Dial/International Access Number: 1.404.920.6440. Conference ID: 868895# ♦

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