

ROCK

★ Working to Extend Democracy to All ★

★ Volume 1, Number 7 ★

★ July 2012 ★

PRISONER RESISTANCE SWEEPS THE SOUTH

“We’re tired of being treated like animals.”

Last week, prisoners in two different facilities in the United States resisted inhumane conditions — one through an uprising that the mainstream media dubbed a “riot,” and the other through a hunger strike. The tactics employed by the two groups differ, but the messages are clearly linked: Prisoners are protesting their conditions and are willing to put their lives on the line to fight for better treatment.

On May 20, inmates took control of the Adams County Correctional Facility in Mississippi for over eight hours. One inmate managed to access a cell phone during the uprising and called WLBT TV in Jackson, proving his presence in the prison by sending pictures. He gave the station the following statement: “They beat us; we’re just [paying] them back. We just need better treatment and services. We need medical attention. We just want some respect. They call us wetbacks” — referring to a racist slur used against undocumented immigrants.

The prison is privately owned by Corrections Corporation of America (CCA), which manages over 60 facilities and touts a capacity of 90,000 beds. The prison in Adams County is populated by immigrants from over 70 countries awaiting deportation and is part of a larger war on undocumented immigrants in the United States. 2011 was a record year for deportations: 396,000 people were removed from the country, and more than half of those people were convicted of crimes and held at private immigration detention facilities like the one in Adams County.

During the uprising, one guard was killed, and several guards and inmates were injured. Over two dozen guards were re-

portedly held hostage. The prisoners were subdued by SWAT teams, which dropped pepper spray grenades and tear gas bombs into the facility. Before it was quashed, more than 600 of about 2,500 total inmates were reportedly involved in the takeover.

The mainstream media, much like the prison officials themselves, have sought to silence the grievances that motivated the uprising. Nearly every headline has emphasized images of violence, tumult, disorder. Many news outlets claimed that a gang fight started the revolt, yet they fail to explain how a clash between rival gangs could result in an apparently unified uprising with clear demands.

The nature of the uprising and the death of a prison guard in the midst of it have given the media a pretext to ignore the massive violence and brutality that prisoners suffer across the country every single day. The incident is also symptomatic of the fact that the privatization of prisons like the one in Adams County means a lack of oversight and responsibility, which results in inhumane conditions for inmates. The Mississippi Immigrants Rights Alliance has received numerous complaints about the conditions of this CCA facility and many others, with reports of beatings, overcrowding, substandard food and lack of proper medical care, among other grievances. These are precisely the kinds of problems that were cited by those who took matters into their own hands in Mississippi by mounting an occupation.

Meanwhile, 45 prisoners at Red Onion State Prison in Wise County, Virginia were plotting another kind of resistance: a hunger strike, which they launched on May 22. With the help of a network of prisoner-support activists in the area, the hunger strikers

released 10 demands and a press advisory. Among these demands were such basics as fully-cooked food and access to fresh fruit and vegetables, access to complaint and grievance forms, an end to torture in the form of indefinite segregation, and adequate medical care. Five hundred of the 1,700 inmates at Red Onion — Virginia’s only “supermax” prison — spend 23 hours a day in isolation. Inmates at Red Onion have also reported being beaten by guards and bitten by dogs.

Prisoner hunger strikes like this have been growing in frequency. Just in the past year, hunger strikes have happened at the Ohio State Penitentiary, the Corcoran State Prison, Pelican Bay State Prison, Ironwood State Prison, Kern Valley State Prison and more. Prisoners around the world are also choosing to resist by hunger striking, most notably the 2,500-strong Palestinian prisoner hunger strike that went on for weeks and was ultimately hailed as a victory. As we write, there are prisoners fasting in resistance in Dubai, Morocco, Egypt and, earlier this week, a 110-day hunger strike ended in Bahrain.

On Tuesday, a flurry of articles, including one in *The Washington Post*, ran with headlines claiming that the hunger strike at Red Onion prison had ended. In order for the state to officially recognize a hunger strike, inmates must reject their meals for nine consecutive days, which Virginia Department of Corrections Director Harold Clarke said they had not. In response to the news, activists with the group Solidarity with Virginia Prison Hunger Strikers issued a response challenging the validity of the DOC’s statements:

There has been a history of organizing at this prison to protest the inhumane condi-

tions since the opening of the prison. Because it was the prisoners themselves who put their bodies on the line to call attention to injustices at Red Onion, it should be the prisoners to whom we listen over the press releases of the Virginia Department of Correction. Given that the VA DOC both failed to acknowledge the hunger strike at the onset and engaged in sending out misinformation, their version of events is suspect.

At Red Onion, one of the hunger strikers' representatives denounced the inhumanity of the prison:

We're tired of being treated like animals. There are only two classes at this prison: the oppressor and the oppressed. We, the oppressed, despite divisions of sexual preference, gang affiliation, race and religion, are coming together. We are rival gang members but now are united as revolutionaries.

Those affirmative words echo a rich and varying legacy of prisoner resistance that is all but forgotten in the American consciousness. Perhaps the most famous prison uprising in U.S. history was the Attica rebellion of 1971, when prisoners took control of the facility in upstate New York for five days before Governor Nelson Rockefeller approved a military siege. Thirty-one prisoners were killed, and nine guards died in the hail of bullets used to quash the occupation. Yet, over the course of those five days, the prisoners at Attica built a sense of community, about which one black prisoner later said, "I never thought whites could really get it on ... But I can't tell you what the yard was like, I actually cried it was so close, everyone so together."

As the speaker from Attica and the representative at Red Onion State Prison both allude to, it is when divides of race, identity, and affiliation start to break down that prisoners are empowered to seek better conditions and more rights. These struggles also depend on those on the outside who show solidarity and help to spread awareness of the prisoners' grievances. Supporters of the Red Onion hunger strike are organizing through their website and an online petition. The *San Francisco Bay View* has posted a further list of ways people can support the Red Onion revolutionaries. Inmates are putting their lives in danger to fight for meaningful change in a brutal system, but without people outside the prisons echoing them, their cries can continue being silenced and ignored. ♠

*This article was originally published by
Waging Nonviolence*

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

From Arturo Castellanos, June 15, 2012

I'm one of the PBSP - SHU Representatives. I'm writing this note today to thank all our outside supporters, especially the Mediation and Coalition Teams, and the staff of the "ROCK" and "PHSS" newsletters for correcting the 'rumor' that we were going on another Hunger Strike (HS) in June-July 2012. What matters here is that people understand that we remain unified in our collective efforts towards ending more than 25 years of systematic state sanctioned torture in this corrupt system; and it is our belief that in order for our efforts towards this end to be most effective, prisoners across the state need to be patient and remain on the same page as much as possible.

Now, in response to your question about whether or not we'll be resuming our peaceful protest activity via H.S. within the next month or two? Presently, I don't see this happening - hell! As of this date we have yet to see a copy of CDCR's alleged 'revisions' of (5-22-12) to their 'STG' policy proposal, etc, etc, etc.

However, it's important to note that **if** CDCR's "STG" proposal remains non-responsive to our Five Core Demands, and our Rejection of their "STG" Program that we issued in March 2012, then all options will be considered, to determine what forms of peaceful protest actions are best suited to smartly and effectively challenge CDCR's failure to grant our demands, and force them to do so via peaceful actions inside and out. And **if** a majority decide the best thing to do is resume a HS at some point in the near future, or beyond, then I'm personally ready for this, and I'm looking at using our prior strategies, as well as any new ones, that will get us to the end and conclude in **our** favor. It's also important to remember each individual needs to determine what works best for them.

As to your question about, what was the most effective strategy in our prior two HS actions, in a statewide setting like ours? In my personal opinion, the strategy was to have a solid core group willing to starve ourselves to the death if necessary, in order to achieve our stated purpose; that is, ending 25 plus years of ceaseless torture of ourselves and our loved ones outside. Together with outside support to help expose and keep pressure on state officials to force

them to grant our Five Core Demands prior to anyone having to suffer serious damage or death.

In retrospect, I see two key components coming into play from the prior two HS Actions, that were very effective and which need to be kept in mind, as follows. The first, and most important component included the crucial support of all of the families, organizations, and people of conscience who came together in solidarity to support our cause on the outside, who applied a lot of pressure on state officials, as well as gaining a lot of media exposure -- and continue to remain strongly committed to doing so to this day! Without our outside support efforts, state officials would have allowed us all to suffer the slow agonizing death one experiences from starvation.

The second important component was the number of prisoners who joined our HS Actions in solidarity across the state, which had the unintended, yet very beneficial, effect of causing major disruptions to normal prison programs statewide during the course of the two HS Actions. This too was instrumental in forcing CDCR to recognize that masses of prisoners were no longer willing to accept being subjected to policies and practices deemed to violate human rights, and viewed as torture by the international community. And although CDCR is **still** playing games, the two massive HS Actions last year demonstrated our power when we remain unified and committed in achieving our goals via our collective efforts inside and out. The above two components helped us come to the point we're at now, and need to be kept in mind.

Now, your question, as for the various HS strategies themselves employed by individuals across the state? As we discovered after both HS's, it was all about improvisation, to go with whatever strategy works best for each individual in order to get us to the end; for example, a lot of us here in PBSP Short Corridor Main Reps, and others, just went straight through, committed to doing so until an acceptable resolution was reached, e.g., CDCR's word to grant our Five Core Demands if given time to do so -- yet, Core Demands 1-3 remain at issue. Some got on the HS 5 to 10 days after it began, and a lot of others went on a "rolling" hunger strike in waves, i.e., groups of prisoners would go on hunger strike between 3 to 5 days, then off for 1 to 2 days, then back on for 3 to 5 days, etc, until the end. Importantly, they were on HS for at least 3 full days; because CDCR

doesn't officially declare one on HS until they miss 9 consecutive meals; therefore they were all very effective and complimentary of each other, and each were very acceptable strategies for people to utilize for this type of protracted struggle on the inside, while our continued outside support remains crucial for maintaining worldwide exposure and related pressure on state officials for as long as it takes to bring such actions to an end. And that concludes my California Hunger Strike history lesson for today.

And again, thank you "ROCK" and "PHSS News" for printing my last letter to correct that rumor.

Always, In Solidarity, Arturo Castellanos, C17275, D1-121, PO Box 7500, Crescent City CA 95532. ♠

THE LATEST UPDATE FROM THE MEDIATION TEAM

The version of the "concept paper" that the mediation team and prisoners were given in March was called their "5.0" version. In May, the prisoner reps were informed by a CDCR official that a "6.0" version was in the works. Most recently, the mediation team was informed that CDCR is working on version "6.5" and translating that into actual regulations. CDCR has not released versions "6.0" or "6.5" to the mediation team. Therefore, their contents are unknown.

In terms of process and timing, CDCR estimated in mid-June that it would take a couple of months to draft the regulations themselves. There will need to be a period of negotiations with labor, since the review processes have labor implications. CDCR says they hope to begin the review of everyone in the SHU, "probably starting with Pelican Bay" after the new regs are written, but before the whole administrative hearing process to adopt new regulations has been completed.

Also in mid-June, CDCR informed the mediation team that they will not speak with "external stakeholders" about these policy revisions any longer, due to the class action lawsuit being filed. The mediation team will continue to monitor the evolution of these regs, to share the information we get, and to comment publicly every chance we get. ♠

The Mediation Team

SENATORS START A REVIEW OF SOLITARY CONFINEMENT

By Erica Goode, NY Times, 6/19/2012

Solitary confinement "is inhumane and by its design it is driving men insane," a former inmate who spent 18 years in prison in Texas, a decade of that time in isolation on death row before being exonerated, told a Senate panel in a hearing on Tuesday.

"I lived behind a steel door that had two small slits in it, the space replaced with iron and wire, which was dirty and filthy," said Anthony Graves, whose conviction for involvement in multiple murders was overturned in 2006. "I had no television, no telephone and most importantly, I had no physical contact with another human being."

The hearing, held before the Subcommittee on the Constitution, Civil Rights and Human Rights, represents the first time lawmakers on Capitol Hill have taken up the issue of solitary confinement, a form of imprisonment that many human rights advocates believe violates the Eighth Amendment's prohibition of "cruel and unusual punishment" and that has drawn increasing scrutiny in recent months in the United States and internationally.

The practice, which is widespread in American prisons, has also been the target of a growing number of lawsuits, including a class-action suit filed on Monday on behalf of mentally ill inmates held in solitary at ADX, the federal super-maximum-security prison in Florence, Colo.

Last month, civil rights lawyers representing prisoners held for more than 10 years in isolation at Pelican Bay State Prison in California filed suit in federal court, arguing that solitary confinement is unconstitutional.

Senator Richard J. Durbin of Illinois, the assistant majority leader, began the hearing — which he said had the support of both Democratic and Republican committee members — by noting that more prisoners are held in isolation in the United States



Senate hearing on isolation that included a replica of a solitary confinement cell.

than in any other democracy and that about half of all prison suicides occur among inmates in solitary confinement.

"We can have a just society, and we can be humane in the process," Mr. Durbin said. "We can punish wrongdoers, and they should be punished under our system of justice, but we don't have to cross that line." He said he was working on legislation to encourage changes in the way solitary confinement is used.

With more than 250 people packed into two rooms, the hearing was "one of the best attended of the year," Mr. Durbin said, an indication "of the fact that the time is due for us to have this conversation about where we're going."

Over the course of two hours, the senators heard testimony about the effects of solitary confinement and the steps taken in Mississippi and several other states to reduce the number of prisoners kept in isolation.

But the hearing also included a testy exchange between Mr. Durbin and Charles E. Samuels Jr., director of the Federal Bureau of Prisons, who defended the use of solitary confinement for inmates who pose a threat to the safety of staff members or other inmates.

"Do you believe you could live in a box like that 23 hours a day, a person who goes in normal, and it wouldn't have any negative impact on you?" Mr. Durbin asked, pointing to a life-size replica of a solitary confinement cell that had been set up in the hearing room.

"Our objective is always to have the individual to freely be in the general population," Mr. Samuels responded.

"I'm trying to zero in on a specific question," Mr. Durbin said, adding, "Do you believe, based on your life experience in this business, that that is going to have a negative impact on an individual?"

"I would say I don't believe it is the preferred option," Mr. Samuels conceded, "and that there would be some concerns with prolonged confinement."

Mr. Samuels said that of the 218,000 prisoners the bureau is responsible for, only 7 percent are kept in isolation cells. The ADX supermax — where many inmates spend 22 to 24 hours a day in their cells and are denied visitors and other privileges — houses only 490 prisoners, or 0.2 percent of the total population, he said. ♠

REASSESSING THE USE OF SOLITARY CONFINEMENT

[On Tuesday, June 19, the Senate Judiciary Subcommittee on the Constitution, Civil Rights, and Human Rights, chaired by Illinois Democrat Dick Durbin, will hold the first-ever congressional hearing on solitary confinement in U.S. prisons and jails. Dolores Canales will be attending this historic hearing and submitted this testimony.]

By Dolores Canales, June 17, 2012, Reprinted from the S.F. Bay View.

My name is Dolores Canales, I am a member of California Families to Abolish Solitary Confinement (CFASC), I am on the advisory board of CURB (Californians United for a Responsible Budget) and I am also a member of LWSGI (Lives Worth Saving Gang Intervention), all California based organizations.

But above all I am a mother of a Pelican Bay SHU prisoner, and since the hunger strike it has been my goal and passion to bring an end to such inhumane and torturous conditions going on right here in America – land of the free and home of the brave!

When Americans are held in solitary confinement in other countries, it is considered barbaric and a form of torture, Sen. John McCain himself being one of those Americans. But yet, solitary confinement has been a common practice for years on end right here in our prisons.

And why has it been going on so long? Why have there been human beings held in captivity for 20 and 30 years with absolutely no human contact and, in some prisons, even sunlight has been denied for decades at a time? Because these are the people that no one cares about, that have already been judged and condemned because they are in prison.

But on July 1, 2011, in California, prisoners could no longer remain silent! They realized they have now grown old in solitary – some of these prisoners in their 60s and 70s. They knew if something was not done, the next generation would come in to take their place and endure and suffer their living hell.

If only the walls could talk – the walls of the SHU cells that have closed in on minds, crushed men's souls, driven men mad, driven men to suicide. The walls that cry out: "NO ONE HEARS YOU AND YOU

ARE ALL MINE!" The walls that do not even have windows to allow in any ray of sunlight.

But for the men who have endured, their courage and their strength and their unity made the voices heard past the windowless, cement cells of Pelican Bay by risking their own lives and going on a hunger strike – a hunger strike that immediately spread across the state of California, where thousands upon thousands of prisoners came together, joining across 13 prisons!

And not because of the power of the men in Pelican Bay that CDCr (California Department of Corrections and rehabilitation) has attempted to blame, but the power of the message: the message that solitary confinement is a common practice and any one of those prisoners could be next! Right now there are thousands sitting in administrative segregation units – also solitary confinement – year after year, just waiting for a SHU cell to open up, just waiting for a transfer, in a purgatory type state, until the final destination, the very pit of hell.

And I think to myself "only" how much longer will this go on? I wonder if he will be there until he dies or, worse yet, goes insane. I wonder if I will die while he is still in solitary confinement, as one mother, passionate about bringing about and seeing change, has recently passed away. And I think of all the other mothers who went to their grave, praying with their last breath that someone would listen, that someone would care.

In California prisons 70 percent of suicides takes place while in solitary confinement, and still those in authority continue to justify this type of housing. Of course all the money that is being made off of these gulags has nothing to do with the reason we use solitary confinement at an ever increasing rate, or is this the only reason those in authority fight so hard to justify human mental and physical torture?

There are trade shows, marketing, warehousing and ROIs at the cost of human lives, so one can honestly say without prejudice or irrational judgment that this has become a very prosperous and lucrative business. And all the while, the reality of this type of confinement is horrific and sounds like something in a science fiction movie.

Many think this could not really be going on and ask, "What on earth have these pris-

oners done to be housed like this?" The answer, in California, the prisoner does NOT need to have actually done anything, and solitary confinement is literally considered as "non-disciplinary" and for "housing purposes" rather than actual punishment.

Most mornings are hard for me as a mother. I fight back the tears when I see the morning sunlight, a new day, filled with new hope – the sunlight that I know my very own son cannot even see! And I feel the wind and think of those who have not felt something as simple as the wind in decades and how they would consider it an absolute miracle to feel the breeze of fresh air. I can almost feel as they would feel, as my son would feel.

And then there are the days when I can no longer hold back the tears and I cry and think, "God, please help me make it through today, because today I want to give up; today I can't take it anymore. Today I feel like I myself am losing my mind." And then I think, "Who am I to give up when the very ones held in these conditions have not given up and are holding on – for the ones who can no longer take it, for the ones who were taken over by suicide and insanity, for the ones who will come in to fill the tombs of solitary confinement.

I can only imagine as a mother how those who have lost someone because a crime was committed, how they must feel as they hear advocates speaking on behalf of the prisoners. Does this make them re-live and suffer their loss all the more?

I by no means am attempting to disregard anyone who has suffered a loss at the hands of another! I am living with a daily heart-break that is unbearable at times, so I can only imagine a mother's heart who has lost her child at the fault of another. In all sincerity, please know that my heart goes out to another's loss and suffering, but I cannot stay silent and the world must know!

America must be held accountable because of the simple fact that we take pride in our human rights efforts in other countries, while we continue to justify the use of solitary confinement. Many of these prisoners have become translucent in skin color – not just light skinned but actually a ghostly see-through type of image. Many have lost their hearing because the only sounds they ever hear are those of the metal doors slamming shut. Many have poor eyesight because the only light they

ever get is from the fluorescent lights that fill the SHU. And it is well known, many have been driven mad in a state of absolute nothingness!

So today I write this and ask that you hear my voice, that you hear the voices of many of the family members who have now come out, no longer afraid of the retaliation at the hands of CDC and, above all, that you hear the voices of the prisoners being held in captivity, in solitary confinement in America's prisons.

I will definitely be flying out to Washington for the hearing on June 19 and am asking for the opportunity to address the issue of solitary confinement before the Senate committee. Thank you for your time and consideration in this matter. ♦

[For more information or to get involved, contact California Families to Abolish Solitary Confinement (CFASC), 8018 E. Santa Ana Canyon Rd., Suite 100 #213, Anaheim, CA 92808-1102]

POTTY WATCH

Recent revisions to the DOM (Department Operations Manual) have somewhat tightened up on contraband surveillance watch procedures. The DOM requires evidence that a prisoner is concealing contraband. It states, "When it becomes apparent through medical examination, direct observation, or there is reasonable suspicion that an inmate has concealed contraband in their body ... the inmate maybe placed ... on CSW." Procedurally, the request to place someone on CSW "shall be made by the on-duty Watch Commander, and approved at the level of Captain or above during business hours, or by the Administrative-Officer-of-the-day during non-business hours, on weekends or holidays." After 72 hours (3 days), a search warrant (court order) is required, and must be authorized by the warden or chief deputy warden. Also, a medical person must complete a medical assessment before someone is placed on CSW. Reports must be written and submitted to the warden in each case, and the prison must send a general report to Sacramento monthly.

Anyone with information about how contraband watch is being used currently at Pelican Bay is encouraged to write to Carol Strickman, Staff Attorney, Legal Services for Prisoners With Children, 1540 Market Street, Suite 490, San Francisco, CA 94102. ♦

THE CRIME OF PUNISHMENT AT PELICAN BAY STATE PRISON

By Gabriel Reyes

For the past 16 years, I have spent at least 22 1/2 hours of every day completely isolated within a tiny, windowless cell in the Security Housing Unit at California's Pelican Bay State Prison in Crescent City (Del Norte County).

Eighteen years ago, I committed the crime that brought me here: burgling an unoccupied dwelling. Under the state's "three strikes" law, I was sentenced to between 25 years and life in prison. From that time, I have been forced into solitary confinement for alleged "gang affiliation." I have made desperate and repeated appeals to rid myself of that label, to free myself from this prison within a prison, but to no avail.

The circumstances of my case are not unique; in fact, about a third of Pelican Bay's 3,400 prisoners are in solitary confinement; more than 500 have been there for 10 years, including 78 who have been here for more than 20 years, according to a 2011 report by National Public Radio. Unless you have lived it, you cannot imagine what it feels like to be by yourself, between four cold walls, with little concept of time, no one to confide in, and only a pillow for comfort - for years on end. It is a living tomb. I eat alone and exercise alone in a small, dank, cement enclosure known as the "dog-pen." I am not allowed telephone calls, nor can my family visit me very often; the prison is hundreds of miles from the nearest city. I have not been allowed physical contact with any of my loved ones since 1995. I have developed severe insomnia, I suffer frequent headaches, and I feel helpless and hopeless. In short, I am being psychologically tortured.

Claimed reforms or opportunities to be transferred out of the SHU are tokens at best.

Our other option to improve our lot is "debriefing," which means informing on prisoner activities. The guards use this tactic as leverage in exchange for medical care, food, amenities and even, theoretically, removal from the SHU. Debrief sessions are held in complete secrecy. When another prisoner is the subject of a debrief, he is not informed of the content, so he is punished with no means to challenge the

accusations.

I have two disciplinary citations on my record. The first arose because I donated artwork to a non-profit organization. The other is because I participated in a state-wide hunger strike to protest conditions in the SHU. The strike was thought to be a success, with more than 6,000 inmates going without food for several weeks and ending with the promise of serious reforms from the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation. In spite of the promises, the CDCR does not plan to institute any meaningful reforms.

Now fellow SHU inmates and I have joined together with the Center for Constitutional Rights in a federal lawsuit that challenges this treatment as unconstitutional. I understand I broke the law, and I have lost liberties because of that. But no one, no matter what they've done, should be denied fundamental human rights, especially when that denial comes in the form of such torture. Our Constitution protects everyone living under it; fundamental rights must not be left at the prison door. ♦

[Gabriel Reyes is a prisoner at California's Pelican Bay State Prison. This article appeared on page A - 14 of the San Francisco Chronicle, May 31, 2012.]

K.V.S.P. LETTER

Dearest Kendra,

Hi how are you doing? I'm sorry I have not responded back to your last letter but the reason for that is because I suffered a misfortune, I broke my back on 4-6-2012. And till this day, I have not been getting adequate medical treatment. I am currently under excruciating pain and am wearing this cardio vascular vest since April 20th 2012. Here are the facts of my misfortune, on April 6th 2012 while on the yard playing sports I went for the ball and three bodies landed on my back while I was pinned semi bent, I held their weight for a quick second but then I fell and my back broke in half. I was unable to get up at all and the correctional officers forced me to walk to medical or they told me that I was not going to get any medical treatment or seen I should say. So the other two inmates had to carry me to the yard clinic and laid me down on the bench and left. While there I explained to c/o's and medical staff how my back felt while there was forced to get up and into shackles

Juan Jaimes..... Continued on page 10

LETTERS

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

More on NCTT

In the May 2012 issue of the *Rock* newsletter, there were some comments about the NCTT and your response was “spot on” in my opinion. The NCTT isn’t trying to supplant the five core demands, it is looking ahead to a bigger picture. It’s like we are all hogtied and chained with several different chains and locks, blindfolded and gagged, and on top of all of that, this goon has a big boot on our neck that’s obstructing our breathing. The five core demands are to get this boot off of us so that we can at least breathe, and then work on the other chains. The NCTT is doing a great job and I appreciate their contribution.

Another thing the NCTT is doing, by embracing the occupy movement (which I, myself, and many others, also embrace), is hitching our struggle to theirs — which really are only different parts of the same struggle. They have carried signs in support of our protest!

The first thing I thought about when I read the NCTT’s analysis and formation of demands to give the occupy movement a clear direction, was that this group [NCTT] would be ideal to write something for the mainline if and when they were ever ready to rock the boat. I mean what lifer doesn’t want board reform? Who doesn’t want family visiting back for *everyone*? Why shouldn’t the weights and educational programs be put back into effect for all? It’s just comforting to know that when his ever start to happen, we do have the people that can give it a clear direction if needed.

And speaking of the mainline, I hope they out there realize that the step program the CDCR is getting ready to put into use is not meant to release those from the SHU, but to fill the SHU up even further with those presently on the mainlines. They need to stop the madness of lashing out at each other, their frustration is misdirected, their energy misguided, and in the end only hurts our struggle to shut down these SHUs. We need a united front, all on the same page, so stop all madness that leads to division.

We also need these newsletters (*Rock*) that support our struggle, we need to finance them. Nobody is going to pick up

the tab for us, at least not for long. So send donations, those who can, it doesn’t have to be much, a few dollars a few stamps. I have done so and will do so again.

Please print my name and address, and thanks for all you’re doing. Great job!

Gabriel A. Huerta C-80766
P.O. Box 7500 (D3-222)
Crescent City, CA 95532

[Ed’s Response: Yeah, what he said.]

Update

Greetings! Here’s a brief update on where things presently stand re: CDCR’s Gang Management Policy Change Proposal.

The bottom line is this; CDCR will submit their proposal to the office of Administrative Law (OAL), in the near future for a public comment period, and incorporation into the CCR Title 15.

Once the proposal is submitted to the (OAL), it’s a done deal... and absent peaceful direct action to force the mandatory major changes required in order to make any gang management policy changes acceptable, we’ll be stuck with CDCR’s version as is for the next 25 years.

Back in March, we rejected CDCR’s proposal in its entirety! And, people need to remember that as it stands now, CDCR’s proposal means that ALL prisoners classified as validated gang members (STG-1) will continue to be confined in the SHU, tortured in definitely based on the same sham “intelligence” based informational criteria that’s been used & abused by CDCR’s goon squads for the past 25+ years (e.g. confidential informant/debriefers claiming you’re involved in “criminal gang activity”, keeps you in SHU without being formally charged, etc...)

This is not acceptable for reasons spelled out in our March rejection of CDCR’s proposal... and it’s now time for people to present their views on what they believe would be the smartest, most effective peaceful action response to CDCR’s proposed changes; and the best time for it??

People can do this via word of mouth and use of the various periodicals covering these issues!

Also, a big shout out in solidarity and appreciation for the continuing support efforts from families, loved ones, and organizations including Mary Ratcliff of *San Francisco Bay View*, Kendra Castaneda, and California Families to Abolish Solitary

Confinement, to name a few!! The outside collective efforts & support of families, loved ones, and other people of conscience together with our collective efforts inside all comes together as a powerful force!!

Together we win, divided we fall!! With respect & solidarity,
Todd Ashker, May 28, 2012

In response to CDCR’s Security Threat Paper:

5-28-2012. I’m one (1) of the four (4) principal SHU-Reps here at PBSP who attends the monthly meeting with SHU-Associate Warden P.T. Smith. Note: my “personal mail” is still restricted to only those on my approved personal mail-list but I can write periodicals in general.

During our last meeting of May 23, 2011, Warden Lewis and CDCR Deputy Director Stainer dropped in. The reps asked Mr. Stainer several questions about the revisions to the STG. He was vague in his answers and then said although they are on his I-pod, he hasn’t seen them yet. And they should be out in two weeks. Bottom line, it was the same old CDCR evasive tactics and the guy just basically wasted our time. Oh, he did say that the STG will replace the 6 year Inactive Status Program – Big Whoop! Yeah, it will but it will have the same end result. Only this time, we’ll all be bouncing back and forth like a ping-pong ball between step-1 and step-2, all while we’re in the same cell until we die. Thus, I personally don’t see any real change coming in their revisions to the STG that we already rejected in March. I hope I’m wrong but with CDCR’s track record, I doubt that I am.

My question to you all your readers is, when these so-called revisions come out, and they also remain like the ones we rejected. What is going to be our “peaceful” response to Sacramento-CDCR, other than flat out rejecting it? Write your peaceful suggestions to this periodical ASAP. Myself, I’m not going to sit on my hands in this cell and allow CDCR to in act those same proposals – as is – into the Title 15 Regulations without first standing up and be counted among those who will send a strong peaceful response to change them.

Finally, I’ll like to take this opportunity to express our thanks and appreciation to Kendra Castaneda, who is presently putting together a “new email group” that will in-

clude all prisoners' families from all over California. Families that feel unappreciated and are not being heard by professional groups, where they have been left out of the process in helping their loved ones in prison. Myself, I support her 100% in her endeavors and all those involved and will be involved in that new group. And I hope when it's up and running that all prisoners also will encourage their families to be part of it and also fully support it. This way "ALL" family members from all walks of life, education and economic levels will have their very own grass roots movement in support of their imprisoned loved ones. In fact, all interested parties can just email her at her "present" e-mail address, which is kendracastaneda55@gmail.com, and ask her how you can help and support the "new e-mail group movement".

A lot of love and respect to all those in the same frame of mind and spirit.

In solidarity, I remain.

Arturo Castellanos (PBSP Main Rep)

[Ed's Response: In the July 2011 issue of *Prison Focus* I wrote: "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." It appears as if that "grow from scratch" is now in the process of being done. I could say a lot more on this but will leave it alone, at least for now.]

Step Down Program Version 6.0

This letter is to inform you of a revised proposal by CDCR regarding the step down program. On May 23, 2012, during a monthly meeting between SHU prisoner representatives and Pelican Bay State Prison officials, deputy director M. D. Stainer made a brief appearance. He mentioned that, in regards to gang identification and behavior management strategy, there have been some changes since the prisoners' attorneys meeting with CDCR leadership (in late April). A "version 6.0" had been issued the day before (on May 22, 2012) to stakeholders and in the process of being [revised?]. He did not provide any details as to the changes because, according to him, he had not had a chance to review the version 6.0 yet. But, as soon as it's been approved to issue out to prisoners we will get a copy. (Note: as of today we still have not

received a copy.)

The SHU prisoner representatives collective stance is that unless the first three demands of the five core demands are incorporated into this version 6.0 we will remain opposed to the CDCR's proposal of the step down program. We understand that it's a give and take process but so far we have not received any fair consideration or acceptance to the precepts raised in the first three of our five core demands. As such, there have been some discussions on how to move forward, in protest, if no significant changes are made — we'll let you know!

Antonio Guillen, June 5, 2012

Forgiving SNY?

Within an article in issue number six there was an editor's note that really caught my attention. In that note you stated: "let us also not ignore our (GP prisoners') role in creating the need for SNY and PC yards. It's a two-way street." In the next issue of rock would you please elaborate more on this because personally I don't believe that I and like-minded convicts had any role in creating SNY or PC yards before we were removed from the general prison population and placed in the SHU.

You also seem to imply that there should be a unification between prisoners who are on a SNY and those who aren't. If this is your belief I don't agree with it because the majority of people on a SNY can't be trusted. Have you forgotten the reasons people are put on a SNY?

By befriending people who are on a SNY we are letting them think we forgive them for their actions and the damage that they have caused to the lives of so many. They should never be forgiven.

Name Withheld

[Ed's Response: Thanks for your letter. I always like to hear from readers, especially when they disagree with something I had to say. You object to my statement that general population prisoners had some role in creating the need for SNY [Special Needs Yard]. Before getting into a response to that part of your letter let me first clarify what I am not saying. I fully understand the narrow self-interest and individualism that causes people without principles to try and improve their conditions at the expense of others. This is the ideology of capitalism — look out for number one and to hell with everyone else. So I am not suggesting "forgive and forget" in connection with those who climbed up out of SHU by pushing

others down.

What I am suggesting is that by threatening violence, or the use of same, against other prisoners, particularly those who are different or perceived as being weak (gay prisoners, for example), general population prisoners create the pressure that causes some of these prisoners to check-in to PC. Similarly, if a gang member is instructed to do violence to someone by shot caller, that prisoner might prefer to check-in rather than to risk spending additional years in prison for attacking someone who has done him no harm. In short, it is the violent culture of the prison itself that creates the need for a safe place for weaker prisoners to be.

Back in the mid to late 1970s at the Washington State penitentiary in Walla Walla some friends and I created a group called Men Against Sexism (MAS). At the time prisoners at that facility established their place in the prison's social pecking order by raping weak and vulnerable prisoners. The weak were bought and sold like chattel slaves. Those who could not or would not stand up for themselves had no choice but to check into protective custody or be someone's punk. MAS changed that dynamic by providing safe cells for the vulnerable, and by intervening into the sexual slave trade. This was not easy. But we put a stop to prisoner-on-prisoner rape and the buying and selling of prisoners by other prisoners.

In those days at Walla Walla the commissary shack was located out in the open, near the entrance to the Big Yard. When elderly prisoners would go to pick up their commissary, predators would often be waiting to rob them as they returned to their cells with sacks full of commissary. MAS would escort these older or sickly men back to their cells to prevent them from being robbed.

MAS was an example of how to lessen the need for prisoners to look to their captors for protection. I think you'll agree that had it not been for the rapists and predators there would have been much less need for a protective custody unit. It is in this sense that I asked prisoners to understand that it's a two-way street, that their culture of greed and violence fuels the need for protective custody units.

I am not suggesting that prisoner today do what we did yesterday, as today's prisoners are way too backwards for that.

What I am asking is that today's prisoners at least take some small amount of responsibility for creating the conditions

that have caused nearly half of California's prison beds to be SNY. This condition exists nowhere else in the nation! Until you can look at this problem and address it in a serious way there will be little hope for significant or substantial change in your conditions of existence.

Change must not only take place around you, it must also happen inside you—you too must undergo change. California's prisoners are quick to blame everyone but themselves. I know you do not see it yet, but you are about to get into a fight with a school-yard bully that's twice your size (CDCR), and because of your self-induced blind spot you are going into that struggle with one arm tied behind your back. How's that old saying go? "There's none so blind as those that will not see."

Responsibility is not something that's given to you; rather it's something you take. Instead of putting all of the blame on CDCR, the shot callers also need to take some responsibility for the mess California's prisons have become.

As a prisoner you are held in a state of dependency and irresponsibility. This is in part because until recently you've collectively refused to take any responsibility for how things are. When you take responsibility you will also be taking power—the power to bring about long overdue change.]

Course Correction?

I would like to comment on the article entitled "On Form and Content" which proposes a sub-demand be made to the Five Core Demands for the allowance of 'Association' (see *Rock* volume 1 number six), including such specifics as group yard, dayroom, cellmates, etc. This proposal does seem like an attractive idea and may be an appropriate response to CDCR's continued failure to meaningfully overhaul its gang validation policies.

On its face, amending section "A" of Core Demand number Three to specify and define the parameters of, "End Conditions of Isolation" could draw even greater outside support due to the existing abolish the SHU/Supermax movement that has been campaigning nationwide long before the hunger strikes in 2011 were initiated. However, I do not agree that the current strategies or objectives are "incorrect" or doomed to failure. The arbitrary gang validation policy and practices has been the vicious hammer CDCR has used to bludgeon us with and must be reformed.

While it is not up to me to evaluate and

assess the impact, appropriateness, and timeliness of such an amendment, I have complete faith that whatever course the hunger strike (short corridor) representatives choose is the correct.

Personally, I see the current ongoing protest as an unmitigated success regardless of whether all objectives and demands are met. A slumbering giant has been awakened. A collective consciousness has been sparked among prison masses that real change can be obtained if we unite and demand reform. Unfortunately for CDCR, this genie cannot be put back in the bottle.

I do have a suggestion for the representatives to consider. It may prove beneficial to retain one or two qualified corrections experts, preferably with prison gang expertise, to review and prepare a report on the amended STG proposal CDCR is about to shuffle out. CDCR has taken the position (thus far) that the frivolous and innocuous information relies on its gang validation practices is customarily relied upon in other state prisons. This flawed justification can be countered with credentialed testimony that points out the risk of erroneous identification inherent in the current vaguely worded criteria as well as pointing out the other flaws in a proposal.

The SHU mediation team expects the next battleground to be in the state legislature in front of the public safety committees. Favorable expert testimony could prove persuasive both there and in the court of public opinion. However, I am just a lone voice in the wilderness; I leave the wisdom of such a tactic to minds sharper than my own. I for one would definitely answer the call for donations to retain experts.

Vincent C. Bruce, P.B.S.P.

Chips and Popcorn

Please continue to support papers like this one. We always want to stay up on information and events, we always want to see progress and coming changes. Yet we spend \$4 million annually on canteen and packages, etc., from these officials. We also spent nearly \$1 million annually on other reading materials and books and electronics to keep ourselves happy and comfortable. Yet we never even consider supporting all those fighting for improved conditions or our freedom (FACT, CPF, etc.). We need to have more solutions and less complaining. If you have great ideas, share them with advocates. But please stop criticizing these organizations while spending all your money with your oppressors.

We truly need to support, strengthen, and finance of these organizations, not just sit back and eating CDCR-bought popcorn and chips and criticize the progress of these movements. That's what's up. Always support those who backup and support you.

Name withheld

[Ed's response: Many of these letters, such as the "Course Correction" letter before this one, urge their fellow prisoners to financially support and otherwise contribute to publications like *Rock*. I generally edit out those calls, as it would be repetitive to repeatedly print the same plea over and over again.

It is unlikely that many prisoners would disagree with the need for a national organization of prisoners, or that a prerequisite for such an organization would be a national publication aimed at prisoners. When I became an editor of *Prison Focus* my goal was to transform it into a national prisoner-oriented newspaper. Now, more than ten years later, CPF is financially unable to reliably get that newspaper out to California readers, let alone nationally (four times a year). The *Rock* newsletter reaches a mere 150 of the over 150,000 California prisoners. Even at that miniscule number, readers are not contributing enough to cover the cost of production (see Editorial on p. 9).

It need not be this one, but at some point California prisoners are going to have to take responsibility for building first the statewide and then the national publication for prisoners. Again, responsibility is not something that is given to you — it is something you take.]

A Mind Blower

I just read your June #2 issue of *Rock* that one of the fellas passed to me. This was my first time seeing such a thing. It was interesting/educational. I am not validated. But even though I was not in A.S.U. during the hunger strikes, we participated in the GP yards here at Calipatria. I am sending money for a subscription.

When I get back out to mainline I can open others' eyes with your newsletter. A lot of the people in GP are ignorant to a lot of this; they kind of have an idea but don't fully understand what it is that is trying to be accomplished here. I was ignorant, but not anymore. If your issue changed my perceptions about all of this in a major way, I'm sure it will affect others the same way. I can spread the word and have more of an impact when I hit mainline.

Name Withheld

[**Ed's Comment:** What folks in GP (and those who are like minded) can do is to go from cage to cage selling subscriptions and asking for donations to *Rock* and/or *Prison Focus*. If people on the inside can generate the funding I'll do my best to organize a distribution collective out here in minimum custody. GP must be made ready to peacefully and lawfully shoulder the final phase of this struggle—a monumental task that cannot be done from either the SHU or the streets. A step in that direction would be to grow prisoner readers of *Rock* to around 50,000 state-wide subscribers.]

EDITORIAL SEVEN

I am in the process of recovering from an operation in which my left shoulder (both the ball and the socket) were replaced with titanium. Now, with only one functioning arm, everything is done more slowly. This is especially true in the case of the handwritten articles and letters you send—my one-handed typing skills just aren't that great. There are steps you can take to help. If you want an answer to any letter you send, for example, you should enclose a self-addressed and stamped envelope (SASE). This will save me both time and money. Secondly, if you want information about the courts, legislators, or state officials, send that request to someone other than me, as I don't have the time to do that sort of work. Thirdly, it would be helpful (but not necessary) if you to have someone on the streets keyboard and e-mail me any long articles or letters you want published.

I can get two issues of this newsletter out with one cartridge of toner ink for my printer. That toner costs \$154 per cartridge. My print run for each issue 150 copies. Then it costs 45 cents to mail out each of those 150 newsletters, for a cost of \$67.50.

Since the first of the year I've put out six issues (this will be the seventh). In that time I've received \$174 from prisoner accounts and 550 postage stamps. That's 247.50 in stamps and \$174 in cash for a total of \$421.50. Divide that by six issues and you come up with \$70.25 per issue being donated by prisoners. So far your contributions have paid for half of the printer toner cartridges used since the first of the year, everything else has come out of my pocket. Remember, I am 70 and my only income is social security.

Please keep those donations coming in so I can keep this newsletter going out. ♦

OPPRESSION, RESISTANCE, UNITY, POWER:

A Statement in Support of the Virginia Hunger Strike

By Kevin 'Rashid' Johnson

In protest against the ongoing foul and inhumane conditions at Virginia's Red Onion State Prison – one of Amerika's most notoriously abusive and racist prisons – dozens of men at the prison went on a hunger strike. The strike began on May 22, 2012 and lasted several weeks.

I had spent over a decade imprisoned at Red Onion. Much of that time was spent in political growth, and my writing and circulating reports and articles to publicly expose abuses there, and trying to help build us a support structure on the outside.

I also struggled to impart to my peers the truism that while oppression does breed resistance; resistance without unity and public support is futile. Which is why our captors promote division and individualism among prisoners – a “mind your own business” and “don't concern yourself with others” mentality – and manipulate us to misdirect our frustrations and ‘resistance’ against and between ourselves. It is also why they maneuver at every turn to alienate the general public against us with fear and hatred. The old Willie Lynch game.

To repress my efforts, officials kept me in solitary, often isolated from other prisoners. They routinely censored, destroyed and ‘lost’ my correspondences; imposed increased repression and abuses on me; and finally, on February 11, 2012, transferred me cross-country without notice or explanation to the Oregon prison system.

But I'd like to believe that despite their attempts to undermine and frustrate this work, my efforts, in collaboration with others of like mind, took root and bore fruit.

Many of the hunger strikers are men

whom I had the honor of serving as both student and teacher. Many are members of street tribes (so-called gangs) whose traditional rivalries kept them divided against and at odds with each other – divisions and conflicts which Red Onion officials acted at every turn to fuel and perpetuate. However, as one of the representatives of the hunger strike stated:

We're tired of being treated like animals. There are only two classes in this prison: the oppressor and the oppressed. We, the oppressed, despite divisions of sexual preference, gang affiliation, race and religion, are coming together. We are rival gang members, but now are united as revolutionaries.

And the prisoners now have an outside voice and support structure, to publicly air their grievances and demands for basic human rights.

As I often point out to my peers, although we outnumber them at least ten to one and many of us are in prime physical condition, our oppressors have power, and the power to oppress us, only because they have unity and control public opinion; whereas they keep us divided and the public alienated against us. It is just as effective a political tool today as it was yesterday on Southern slave plantations and in campaigns to exterminate Native peoples and subjugate Mexicans to turn profits and steal land. It is the politics of oppression.

But today's prison movement is learning. From Georgia's prisoner strike of 2010, to California's prisoner hunger strike of 2011, to this latest hunger strike at Red Onion. We are learning that not only does oppression breed resistance, but political consciousness breeds unity, and unity begets power. It enables so long indoctrinated to believe themselves as powerless to see that they can challenge and change oppression by uniting against their common oppressor.

The greater our numbers and unity, the greater our power to turn mere resistance into seizure of power, which is why unity of the oppressed is the greatest fear of any oppressor. The prison movement has much to teach us. We are conquered only because and insofar as we are divided. ♦

*Dare to struggle! Dare to win!
All power to the people!*



Sell Your Art On the Web

Sell prisoner-created art or crafts (except writings). Send only copies, no originals!

**Prison Art Project
P.O. Box 47439
Seattle, WA 98146**

**www.prisonart.org
sales@prisonart.org
206-271-5003**

Prison Art is a nonprofit website. It charges a 10 percent fee if your art or craft sells. Send SASE for a free brochure. No SASE, no brochure. This offer void where prohibited by prison rules.

Juan Jaimes..... Continued from page 5

by c/o's until the paramedics arrived.

Short thereafter arrived in Delano Medical Regional Center where I was put in a room for hours until x-rays were performed on my back only to tell me that nothing was wrong with me, quoting from them "you only have back 'spasms'." I was like how are you going to tell me there's nothing wrong when I'm telling you I cannot walk nor stand on my feet? I was kicked back on the yard with no pain medications, no walker, etc... On April 11, 2012, I was seen by the yard doctor and I explained to him that I couldn't walk and that my back feels loose and that I'm in severe pain. He then examined my back and noticed it was swollen and had bumps so he ordered x-rays and so on. April 13 2012, I went and got x-rays. On April 17 2012, while in my cell I get called to the institutional hospital and as soon as I arrived the Doctor tells me that I have fractured vertebrae L-1 and a squished disc. I was sent to Bakersfield to be seen by specialist and was told I could end up paralyzed.

Look I'm sorry I may not make any sense but it's a little difficult for me to focus, I

been on my back for 2 months and some change now wearing this vest that does not help me at all, let alone this pain I have to go through 24/7 since having put this vest on. I have not received any pain medications nor a walker, etc... Although I have a (CDCR) Chrono for such. Look I don't want to bored you with my problems but I wanted to ask you if by chance you know of any law firms that deal with suits, I'm unable to write and the appeals that I do submit are all being sent back to me and need legal & professional help.

As for the hunger strike at Corcoran (ASU), the warden (Warden Gipson) promised all these things on the petition but did not follow through on anything and yes, Christian Gomez died due to not eating. Sorry for this long delay hope to hear back from you, may you and your loved ones enjoy your day/night.

Respectfully,

*Juan Jaimes, # V-08644,
K.V.S.P., A-6-107, P.O. Box 5101,
Delano, CA 93216*

[Written on 6/25/2012 to Kendra Castaneda, postmarked on 6/27/2012 and transcribed on 6/29/2012. Due to his hand-

writing very scratchy, it was difficult to make some words out.

Juan Jaimes was one of the main three petitioners for the Corcoran ASU hunger strike for better conditions that happened in December 2011/January 2012 who was transferred to Kern Valley State Prison by CDCR in hopes the strike broke up. <http://sfbayview.com/2012/corcoran-officials-retaliate-against-hunger-strikers.>] ♦

Quote Box

"You stand with the belligerent, the surly, and the badly behaved until bad behavior is recognized for the language it is: The vocabulary of the deeply wounded and of those whose burdens are more than they can bear."

Gregory Boyle, Tattoos on the Heart

"Those who do not move, do not notice their chains."

Rosa Luxemburg

"Whenever you find yourself on the side of the majority, it's time to pause and reflect."

Mark Twain

**Ed Mead, Publisher
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Notice

Articles and letters sent to the *Rock* newsletter for publication are currently being delivered and I am receiving them in a timely manner. Please do not send such materials to third parties to be forwarded to me as it only delays my receiving them and adds to the workload of those asked to do the forwarding.

FIRST CLASS MAIL