



**REPORT ON THE EMERGENCY RESPONSE ACTIVATED AROUND MARION
BY THE NATIONAL CAMPAIGN TO STOP CONTROL UNIT PRISONS
MARCH 1997**

In an attempt to become more scientific about our Emergency Response Network, I am writing this report about the activation of the network around the situation in Marion Federal Penitentiary. This report deals only with the email aspect of the network which is the part that I was directly responsible for.

I emailed the request to the National Campaign list which is about 45 people, as well as to the Prison Activist Resource Center network which reaches, I believe, about 400 people.

I received responses back from 22 people saying they had emailed/faxed or called the various authorities. Other people may have called/faxed or emailed but they didn't let me know. Of those who gave me feedback, they appeared to be very geographically diverse. About half were from the National Campaign to Stop Control Unit Prisons ERN list. The other half were unfamiliar to me and I presume they are on the PARC list. I will, of course, add them (you) to our list. (If you do not want to be added to our list, please let me know.)

About a half dozen people forwarded the letters they had written to the BOP, etc. which were excellent. People reported that they had received letters back from the Warden at Marion and told me generally what was said-- polite denial. One person talked with a woman at the Bureau of Prisons who wanted more information which was then supplied to her without further response. One person said the fax numbers were no longer operative and so she snail mailed instead. A number of other people said they sent their letters snail mail.

It seems to me that this emergency response was a good beginning if we continue to build upon it. In our regional National Campaign meeting we had an interesting discussion which centered around several questions regarding when to activate the campaign. Some of the issues were:

1. We received a letter just recently from a prisoner we know who disputed the facts of the situation. Often we do not personally know the prisoners making the complaints. How can we sort out what actually took place? How important is it that we do so? We are not in a position to really determine the facts of the matter and it might take a long time to come even close. But since these are emergency situations, the quickness of our response is relevant. Our general consensus was that in the case of the Marion situation, it was good to have activated the ERN. Although our credibility is somewhat at stake, it seems important to err in that direction upon occasion, as opposed to taking no action. Additionally, we think it's important that the Warden and the Bureau of Prisons know that there is a growing network of people that are aware of what takes place inside that institution. If we develop this network, we may eventually have the capacity to occasionally influence what they are and are not willing to do. Without such

pressure, they function with total impunity.

2. A second issue has to do with the question of self-defined reactionary (which often translates into racist) white prisoners who are under attack by the state. Someone sent out a request to respond to the situation of one such prisoner in the last mailing. We don't know him but that's how we heard him characterized by the person making the request, although it was said that he has changed a good deal since incarceration.

What should our response be? On the one hand, we oppose the arbitrary use of power by the state. We feel that no human being should be treated worse than caged animals, no human beings should be subjected to torture or have their human rights trampled upon. On the other hand, we have limited resources-- time, energy, and money-- and is that the way we want to spend them, in the pursuit of the human rights of racists? We did not reach consensus on this. Although there was a good deal of unity, there were also different shades, with people falling more or less on one side or the other. We all agreed to look at things case-by-case. In the above case, we agreed that we would not want to activate the ERN, particularly in the light of the fact that we are just at the beginning of the process, and to begin with that situation would be a big mistake.

3. A third issue is in regards to the process. We have designated three people as the activators of the ERN. It takes agreement by two out of the three to activate it. Is this a good process? Should anyone be able to send out a request without any screening element? Or should we continue to have a somewhat collective approach to this?

Please let's hear from people on this, particularly those who are active in the National Campaign to Stop Control Unit prisons, although we'd love to hear from all of you who are a part of the ERN. In a real way, you are also part of the National Campaign whether you come to our meetings or not.

Nancy for the Committee to End the Marion Lockdown & the National Campaign to Stop Control Unit Prisons