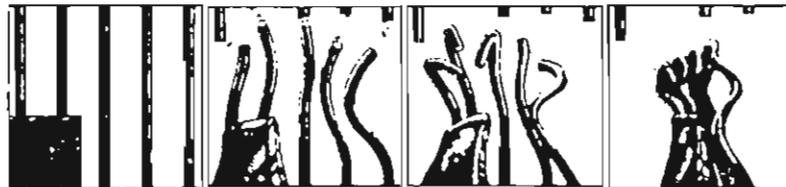


MARION

THE PRISONERS SPEAK

a collection of statements by prisoners at marion



The short time that I've been in USP-Marion has afforded me the opportunity to appreciate the fact that in order for us to understand this institution's reality and its reason for being we have to see it not as an isolated entity but as one that is inter-related and intertwined to the overall structure and its socio-economic, political conditions.

If we look at some of the particular moments of USP-Marion we can begin to see the relationship that was stated above. First, let's consider the economic moment. Marion is situated in an area where the mining industry is the primary economic activity. Due to the depression that this branch of industry has suffered, the prison has become a viable source of employment for unemployed miners. So Marion is not just an incarcerating institution, but also a very important economic one as well. Consequently, the relationship between the prison and the structure is linked more solidly and closely because of the economic crisis in the area and the institution becoming presenting itself as a possible alternative to ameliorate the problem.

Although employment in Marion may not be as significant and rewarding as a job in the mining industry it would be ludicrous to think that unemployed workers would reject employment even if it is the most dehumanizing one. When it comes to putting bread on the family's table, a worker would do just about anything to earn a living, even if it means spending the day looking at prisoners' rectums and genitals and walking around with a club.

The second moment is the climate or mood prevailing in Marion. It could be argued that what is happening is just an exercise of revenge and punishment or the venting of frustration on the part of the institution and the guards. But such an argument would only obviate the fact that the measures undertaken by the institution are permanent and that the mood or climate correspond, to internal pressures as well as to external ones. Therefore this climate is not a fleeting or isolated expression that is going to end one of these days.

If it was not linked to the mood that the government has been generating - one that is characterized by hysteria, fear and intolerance - the external community would object and struggle against the abominable situation in Marion. There would be some public denunciation and pressure to change the prevailing plight in USP Marion.

It's important for us to realize that not since the McCarthy era has there been such a mood in this society, and nowhere is it more blatant and clear than in Marion. The hysteria, the fear and the intolerance are so entrenched that the minutest

move on the part of a prisoner will send guards running for cover or reacting in the most violent form. But this situation could not prevail if Marion could not feed itself from the temperament that the government has created.

The third moment, and probably the most important one to be considered is that Marion is a social experiment with the potential to become a final solution. To have a prison under a permanent lockdown, to deny prisoners access to some basic form of self-realization, to promote the highest level of alienation not only to be suffered by prisoners but by guards as well, and to create an environment where the highest forms of dehumanization are experienced, are the ingredients that make Marion the social experiment par excellence that could be implemented as a final solution.

The decision for such an experiment comes from Washington and is in harmony with the goals and objectives of the government, especially the one to foment a strategy to deal with political dissent. Thus, we can anticipate that more political prisoners are going to end up in Marion where the government can isolate and bury them. Since prisoners are a minority without any support or power, the experiment that has been conducted since 1983 has gone unchallenged. And the scientific data accumulated thus far is capital in the hands of the U.S. government. Unfortunately no movement to counter this detestable human experiment has been organized.

"Can such a human experiment be stopped?" is a question that needs to be answered. Only if a strong movement is organized that can fight Washington and the Bureau of Prisons and that can draw support from those who are directly affected as well as society at large. Within Marion very little can be done since prisoners are isolated from each other and live in an environment where they are more apt to fight among themselves than with the enemy. So any attempt to struggle against USP-Marion must rest within those forces that are progressive and committed enough to want to tackle this issue.

Oscar Lopez
Puerto Rican Prisoner of War
October 1986

Greetings:

Comrades, friends, and supporters. Marion is the colonial prison in southern Illinois, whose operations are morally corrupt and an outrage. The imperialists have sanctioned the repressive, restrictive measures implemented, through endorsements from the executive branch, congress, and the judicial system. No objective criteria exist after induction into Marion for possible release from this prison.

What's alarming now is that if the oppressive procedures are not abated, the "criminalization" program of the government will introduce more politicals into these conditions.

Over the past decade the "Special Investigative Services" (SIS) branch of the government has attacked consistently national liberation movements in the occupied states of New Afrika, Puerto Rico, and Tribal Homelands of Native Americans, among others.

Lawyers, families, and friends have been supposedly connected to outlandish conspiracies. These conspiracies are more sophisticated than Cointelpro operations. Utilizing informants/agents provocateurs to create tangible and intangible acts, to gather movement members together to encircle and attack through the colonial "justice" system.

Mass organization around Marion, Alderson, Lexington, Metropolitan Correctional Centers, and colonial state prisons, are necessary, because more Prisoners of War, political prisoners, and alleged "illegal aliens" are warehoused under the most inhuman conditions the imperialist government can muster.

This international effort constructed by Puerto Ricans, Native Americans, North American anti-imperialists, and New Afrikans is one courageous task, and deeply appreciated by all incarcerated politicals.

Finally I would like to admit that our struggle is directed at the capitalist-imperialist system and its ultimate end. Don't be illusioned by neocolonial reforms in the prisons or the lack thereof. If the system is defeated, a change in repressive prisons are concomitant.

In Struggle,

Kojo Bomani Sababu
s/n Grailing Brown

October, 1986

27/OCT/86 marks the completion of the third year since the imposition of the infamous lockdown on USP Marion, a lockdown that rendered the whole prison a control unit on the pattern of the notorious H block. Since then, the rampant brutality + gratuitous maltreatment of prisoners that characterized the months following the initial lockdown have abated to relative infrequency. Imported goon squads are no longer necessary to administer the beatings, rectal probes, chainings to bunks, + other abuses on which Marion style repression is predicated down to its most trivial details. A vastly inflated local staff costing \$10,000,000 a year is sufficient to commit these depredations on a scale presently adequate to make good their threat in coercing compliance with official edicts, however arbitrary, + in demonstrating the powerlessness of prisoners. Nevertheless, despite the decline from the early days of the lockdown, the counterproductive + needless repression of Marion is still very real + destructive. Moreover, it portends ill not only for prisoners but for members of the general public as well.

Mainline prisoners at USP Marion are forced to spend all but eleven hours per week locked in small cells. Of the eleven, seven (one hour per day) may be spent on the narrow tier in front of the cells + four are divided between two recreation periods, only one of which is outdoors. Nor is cell time the end of the victimization of prisoners. Officials insist on pursuing prisoners into the very corners of their cells with endless senseless rules such as about what property must be positioned where. Many of these decrees are unwritten + no one knows them all, a factor that contributes to their selective + capricious enforcement. (Their promulgation + application indicate that the tension + uncertainty they create is intentional.) Other harassments such as interference with mail, confiscations of property + inflictions of punishment without due process, excessive + destructive searches, continual lies about issues of concern to prisoners, unreasoned denials of even mundane requests, + arbitrary cell + unit changes abound. The library is a cardboard box of paperbacks at the end of the tier. Only one correspondence course at a time is permitted. The warden laments that the meager money required for the few who would take more is not available despite its abundance for useless, anti-prisoner undertakings at a prison that spends \$35,000 per year per prisoner. All of it is backed up by the implied, stated, + occasionally applied threat

of force.

The psychological assault of this abuse also extends to the bureaucratic elements of subsistence at Marion. There are no mandatory written procedures for either consignment to Marion or transfer to a less repressive regimen. Officials are free to use any + all information, including bias, "confidential information" from self-serving informers, supposition + conjecture, or none at all in making their determinations. Prisoners have no input into the process + therefore cannot contest even straight-up wrong information. In the case of transfer out, there is no way for prisoners to know what is required. Administrators insist that movement to + from Marion is done on the basis of their "professional judgement", though if that were anything other than whim, a pattern would be discernible. (The vagaries of this system may be intentional, however, to facilitate surreptitious conversion to Marion's eventual main purpose, once time legitimizes + sanitizes the precedent.) Administrative appeals are routinely denied despite their reasonableness + even in cases where the requested action is already planned, apparently in order to discourage their use + reinforce the impression that prisoners can do nothing to influence their lot. Any accusation by a staff member is considered true, elaborate reporting + "hearing" + appeal procedures that purportedly protect due process notwithstanding. Written requests may or may not be answered + may be answered wrong. If established procedures (those in the security classification policy statement, for example) are not consistent with administrative convenience + desires, they are changed, even if that means diminishing their utility. This, too, is designed to enhance prisoners' insecurity, sense of having no control of anything, uncertainty, + isolation. The courts offer no relief, refusing to become involved in what they term "minutiae" + deferring to the "broad discretion" they accord to prison authorities.

That the Marion policies of maximum restriction have failed in their alleged function is manifest. There has been no decrease in violence in other prisons that can be attributed to Marion, + there is reason to believe the contrary is true. Nor has Marion resulted in the more open operation of the other 46 federal prisons. Instead, it has acted like an anchor to drag the rest of the system toward its repressive extreme as is illustrated by the proliferation of "mini control units" + other elements of

Marion style repression. After three years, administrative claims that Marion abuse is having "positive results" without any evidence to support the contention ring very hollow.

The insistence on the efficacy of Marion's demonstrably failed policies of repression in the face of contradictory evidence is indicative of ulterior motives for covering up their failure to achieve the stated goals + continuing their enforcement. The showing of three years reveals the absence of a legitimate penological objective or public interest in the psychological assault + physical harassment of prisoners down to the very salt packets on food trays. Coupled with the evidence of the negative effects of these injurious practices, that absence shows those ulterior motives to hinge on use of Marion as a laboratory for experiments in social control + manipulation -- even if doing so runs counter to the "mission" of incarceration. Given the obvious cost to prisoners + the fact that some community will pay the price of the stress, anti-social conditioning, + debilitation induced at Marion, it is clear that the experimentation is not intended to be in the public interest. The situation also portrays the divergence between that interest + those of the government.

Knowledge of the maximum restriction regimen at Marion seems to be synonymous with condemnation. This summer, the subcommittee of the U.S. Congress charged with oversight of the Bureau of Prisons (BOP) released a 754 page compilation of some of the testimony + material submitted relative to its hearings on Marion. The subcommittee avoided taking a position itself, but the overwhelming majority of the testimony + articles + letters reprinted in the compilation were condemnatory of the lockdown + its continuation. Even the consultants hired by the subcommittee + who admitted on record their bias + that they had recounted only the views presented by BOP officials acknowledged the inappropriateness of the lockdown + that it should end. Other psychological, correctional, legal, + academic "experts" detailed the deleterious effects of Marion not only for prisoners, but for corrections generally, law, + society as well. Their judgement was that the unnecessary repression is damaging, dangerous, and should not continue. Religious, peace, political, + other groups wrote letters condemning Marion + calling for progressive change. Private citizens from the U.S. + abroad, including lawyers, educators, activists, medical people, journalists, + members of the clergy, condemned Marion. Noone that contributed information

except denizens of the BOP endorsed the BOP's conduct + operation at Marion. Norman Carlson, BOP director, claimed that there were experts outside the BOP to support its position but was unable to produce any to testify or supply statements. The congressional document also exposed at least one other instance of his providing misinformation to the subcommittee.

The destructive repression at USP Marion is of concern to everyone, regardless of how remote the prospect of imprisonment seems to them. It dirties the image of the people in whose name it is perpetrated + wastes their money in a way that can only do them harm. The research + development on how to manipulate + control people against their will being carried out at Marion is something no legitimate government should need + has already found application outside of Marion. Increasingly, people are being subjected to Marion for vague reasons that deviate from its alleged purpose of controlling other prisons, reasons that include "protection" or allow people to be sent directly from the streets. Politically active people need be especially wary, given the growing number of political prisoners, litigators, organizers, etc. being sent to Marion + the particular difficulty they experience in getting transferred out. There is even a Security Level 1 (the lowest) Libyan prisoner at Marion, sent there because of his Libyanness.

These lessons of control will find greater extra-prison application in the future. Congressman Kastenmeier, chair of the subcommittee overseeing the BOP, has linked what is being done at Marion to "fighting terrorism" during testimony before his subcommittee on 26/JUN/85. As the recent Socialist Workers Party legal victory against the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) shows, "fighting terrorism" is a shibboleth for action against progressive alternative political activity generally. In the beginning, there was no "control unit", + then it was only one block of Marion. Now it is the whole prison + there are new control units in other prisons. How long will it be before this maximum restriction mania reaches your community? Given the tendency of repressive attitudes to move laterally as well as vertically in state machinery, the attendant practices may reach you to some degree through some aspect of bureaucracy to which you are closer. Or it may reach you through the release of bitter, stressed-out

prisoners with no social or job skills.

BOP director Carlson + his henchpeople frequently assert that they are "looking at" + "working on" improvements + "relaxations", but nothing has changed positively in policy or practice in the last eighteen months + very little since 27/oct/83. The overt brutality has diminished, but nothing has happened to prevent its large scale reemergence. USA ^{Marion} Warden Gary Henman recently stated on local TV that "Marion is bad enough without staff going to lengths to make it worse.", but restrictions continue to mount as new harassments are instituted + none are repealed. The litigation contesting the brutality + lockdown continues to be slow-walked with U.S. District Court Judge James Foreman sitting on the magistrate's recommendations + refusing to make a ruling. He has been doing so for over a year. Together with his past practice, he is demonstrating his bias + the bankruptcy of asking courts for relief from the actions of their minions. The Congress similarly supports the status quo through inaction, revealing another issue on which, like with aid to the Nicaraguan contras, it is out of step with the people. All that is left is for people, ordinary people, to focus on this issue + demand an end to the Marion lockdown + its counterproductive repression. It is up to the people to apply the pressure that will reverse the growth of this metastasizing cancer, not only in defense of prisoners, but in their own as well. Final solutions have historically been started with the use of "concentration models" like Marion + special oppression against small + particularly vilified minorities.

Bill Dunne
October, 1986

3 YEARS LATER

Extensive outside support is still desperately needed to continue our 3 year long struggle to close USP - Marion, and to erase its oppressive, dehumanizing conditions from the federal prison system. Overall, it's extremely bad here - even depressing at times. And after 3 years, even a blind fool would know that the lockdown is permanent. Along with all of its horrors and dehumanization, it's permanent.

And why is all of this calculated, well-planned, costly government repression being supported and maintained? To pressure us to work in the BOP's prison industries below minimum wages and without social security and other retirement benefits for ourselves and our families in the free world. For, without such massive human repression, no intelligent person would ever passively accept this enslavement without some resistance and petitions for help to the taxpayers who unwittingly support his/her enslavement. And with the enactment and enforcement of the Laws of the 1404 Comprehensive Crime Control Act, with its no-parole, long-term incarceration provisions, the system is going to get worse long before it ever will change for the better.

Right now, however, it seems that only the government's "tales" and the smear campaign about us and its reason for the continued lockdown have had any credibility or long-lasting impression on mainstream America. Moreover, the cold-blooded inaction of the Kastenmeier Committee on Marion, the hard-line attitude of prisoncrat Norman A. Carlson, and the courts of the 7th Circuit with their ultraconservative, restricting rulings on our complaints seem to be saying this to us at Marion.

At Marion and after 3 years of intense struggle, this is how we feel about the total situation.

Finally, there's no sense to this system of "scared straight" penology - period. First, there are no vocational training programs at Marion, all of us don't have life sentences, and no law says we've ever got to be transferred from Marion for educational or vocational training purposes before our release to the streets. Second, hardly any of us have marketable work skills, which tends to exclude us from numerous legitimate employment opportunities, of which Congress, the BOP and the courts that sent us to prison are all aware. Third, America's laws and its social policies are designed to keep and use our records to strip us of all high salaried employment opportunities,

3 Years Later

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which excludes us from legitimate society, because without a steady, substantial income and credit we can't buy or have the luxuries and necessities of life that all add up to happiness in America - the Great Material Society.

So we need your continuing support to help us close USP - Marion, and to upgrade its system of "scaredstraight" penology to a system of corrections that's more in line with the needs of all Americans.

Amor y Paz
El Sangre Miller, Chairman
POW #00214-054
Ad Hoc Committee to Close USP Marion

Dated: October 1986

22 Oct. 1986

USP Marion

Dear comrades,

While I can only speak for myself under these circumstances, I am sure that the Prisoners of War, other political prisoners and militant social prisoners here would join me in extending ~~the~~ revolutionary greetings and solidarity. Since it is the work itself that is most important, I won't impede the progress of this conference with a lengthy paper. I am also limited in that I have only been here a short time and therefore cannot bring the depth of insight of those who have endured here for years, who lived through the violence of the early days of the lockdown or the psychological torture of the Control Unit. The best I can do is to put forward some suggestions to consider while you concretize your work. These suggestions are the distillation of discussions with other prisoners here and an assessment of present conditions.

The prison struggle mirrors the struggles and contradictions within society outside. Due to the enclosed environment of the maximum security prison, the effect is often one of magnifying these contradictions - both positive and negative aspects. Within the same four walls one finds the seeds of heroic rebellion and hopeless apathy; the heights of revolutionary character and the depths of human predation and sadism. Thus, the relative lull in mass resistance to US imperialism and the lack of revolutionary leadership on the streets find their reflections in the prisons. As on the outside the situation is fluid and there have been some important exceptions (eg. Gung Gung, Oklahoma State Penitentiary, Lawton, Virginia). Yet, the high tide of prison

rebellion has largely given way to a period characterized by a reassertion of control by those who run the prisons. They've studied and they've learned. Their methods now run the gamut from the traditional "hit 'em up side the head" to modern combinations of empty co-optive reforms with new repressive tools such as the Control Units ("Special Housing Units" in the states) and the formation of SORT (Special Operations Response Team) riot squads that move anonymously from prison to prison.

Federal prisoners now confront a reorganized and experienced prison system where many of the same human rights issues so bitterly fought for in the 60's and early 70's (decent food and medical care, education, meaningful contact with the family and community, decent and safe housing and living conditions) are reemerging with greater urgency due to the economic crisis of the state and because the feds believe they've achieved an atmosphere where they can get away with it. With the breakdown of an ever-fragile unity that had grown through the era of rebellion, prisoners' survival strategies have largely become individualized or confined to "gangs" or organized religious groups which dutifully become arms of the prison authorities or are broken up. Divide and conquer has been elevated to a fine art. Racism is endemic and escalating. More than ever before, the prison populations teem with informers. The state has reassumed the initiative and any future unified action by prisoners will take place under conditions where the prison authorities defend a tremendous advantage. This is the context within which we must view the struggle at Marion.

The resistance here (and yes, it does exist) is defined by a geography of division and isolation that virtually is

unimaginable to those who have not experienced it. With a population of 300 — subdivided to where one has the possibility of direct contact with no more than 30 other prisoners; where no more than 6 ever leave their cells at a time; where all movement take place in handcuffs with a 2 guard escort per man; where one is almost totally cut off from the outside world — the Marion prison authorities are in a position to individualize their repression. They bring to bear their own experience supplemented by lessons gained by their counterparts in Northern Ireland, occupied Palestine, and the FRG, to fashion a program uniquely designed to "control" each and every prisoner. It can mean the Control Unit, permanent designation to Marion, denial of visits, interference with mail or forcing you to jump through the hoops of their behavior modification UNICOR program. Their goal is control. Their ideal is that we become like them.

For the foreseeable future,

The specific conditions here make it unlikely that another Attica will arise out of Marion.

By this I refer to the highly politicized unity displayed by the prisoners in D-yard. Given the nature of Marion, rebellion will always remain a possibility.

Individual acts of retaliation and retribution are ongoing, especially in the Control and Disciplinary Units, as all other avenues of organized mass resistance remain closed. The wardens have created the terrain upon which we are forced to resist and assert our humanity. We must understand that the lockdown has long since ceased to be an emergency measure. No doubt by design, it has metamorphosed into Bureau of Prison policy. It is acclaimed by state and federal prison administrators. It is applauded by the Reagan administration Congress and the press, all of whom are locked in feverish battle to determine the substance and pace of fascist law and order. The lockdown is the penultimate answer to the rebels, the POWs and political prisoners, the organizers and

the angry, unforgiving men that they themselves have created and now seek to bury. In part the lockdown is a holding action until the death penalty can be instituted across the board for a range of criminal and political offenses.

Thus, it is not a matter of convincing Marion's warden to lift the lockdown but instead it is one of attacking the state's strategy for exercising control throughout an expanding prison system. And as we can see in the construction of the women's control unit at Lexington and the planned expansion of SHU's in New York and other states, momentum is building in this direction. The modern prison administrators are also long-range planners who are self-conscious of their role in counterinsurgency. They too see the potential for generalized crises within the prison system creating the conditions for insurrection. The potential leadership must be isolated and neutralized in advance.

While many of us on the inside are doing what we can, at this juncture, the burden of exposing Marion and the Control Units necessarily falls on those of you outside. You should know that all of your efforts on the prisoners' behalf are deeply appreciated. Your work directly empowers all of us fighting behind the walls. In a very real sense you are also fighting for yourselves. Anyone willing to make sacrifices for social change in this country is a candidate for the concentration camps.

As in revolutionary movements around the world and historically here in the US empire, the prisons will become a significant front. As the comrades of the Ohio 7 continue to face their trials, we should be reminded that the prison movement has produced some of the most dedicated

and courageous combatants that the anti-imperialist movement in the U.S. has ever produced. The degree to which we can build effective organization now on the outside will largely shape the possibilities for the front when conditions change and contradictions ripen. The time will come when the prisoners will reciprocate with our own initiatives. One need only look to Ireland, the FRG or El Salvador for recent examples.

In this spirit, these suggestions for work are submitted:

- 1) We agree - the priority must be working to shut down the Control Units. We suggest that attention be given to existing and planned SHU's in the state systems, particularly in New York.
- 2) Let us try to internationalize the struggle by raising the issue of the Control Units and SHU's with groups such as Amnesty International, and appropriate UN and other human rights organizations. Furthermore, we should seek working relations with organizations working in other countries such as those supporting the German political prisoners, the Irish H-Blockes / Armaugh Committee, for the purposes of joint speaking tours, furthering press and media contacts, sharing propoganda, etc. The potential for learning from these comrades' experiences should not be underestimated.
- 3) We might consider organizing the formation of an independent national monitoring group, composed of representatives of the national liberation movements, clergy, progressive psychologists, human rights advocates, prisoners' rights lawyers etc. to regularly investigate and report on the conditions in the Control Units, Marion and paying particular attention to the treatment of POW's and political prisoners.

- 4) The Bureau of Prisons abhors media exposure unless they initiate or control it (which unfortunately is all too often the case) We suggest the formation of a Media Project to follow up on the positive work surrounding the recently-aired 2-part report on Marion which was broadcast on NPR's "All Things Considered." A video suitable for public or cable television might be considered (funding sources explored, eg. AFSC) which would focus on the Control Units, the international struggles against psychological torture, etc... Progressive and particularly international journalists should be encouraged to visit Marion and Lexington, interview the prisoners and write on the surrounding issues.
- 5) Discussions need to begin among the appropriate organizations and where possible facilitated among the POWs and political prisoners over issues of common concern such as demands for political association (or repatriation)
- 6) Every effort should be made to incorporate the prisoners themselves in the strategic planning of campaigns, conferences, etc. We should have input into the formulation of agendas and given reports of conference results, decisions as well as be given the opportunity to review propaganda. This should be clearly defined and not haphazard.
- 7) Recognizing that the struggle against the lockdown will be protracted, other human rights demands can be addressed in the interim which will in turn highlight the injustice of the lockdown itself:
 - a. Resumption of contact visits. No fingerprinting and photographing of visitors.

- b. Extension of phone privileges beyond 2 ten minute calls per month.
 - c. Full religious rights; regular services for all faiths outside the unit, resumption of Native American sweat lodge ceremony.
 - d. Meaningful educational program
 - e. Private attorney visiting arrangements.
 - f. Increased recreation time in the yard; provision of recreational equipment within the units.
 - g. Access to outside community groups.
 - h. Better access to the courts to file grievances and appeals
- I hope this is helpful. Let us be rigorous in our analysis and bold in our organizing.

Shut down the Control Units!
Stop the Lockdown!
Free all Political Prisoners and POWs!

Tim Blunk, USP Marion
Northamerican political prisoner