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Chicago group protests Marion prison

By Rob Wick
of the Daily Republican
MARION — The only thing missing was Abbie Hoffman.

Shouting chants of "Randy Davis you can't hide. We charge you with genocide" and "Bureau of Prisons, FBI, U.S. Justice is a lie," nearly 200 people marched peacefully and without incident on the Federal Penitentiary at Marion Saturday, protesting the conditions that they claim prisoners are living under.

The Chicago based National Committee to Free Puerto Rican Prisoners of War and the Committee to End the Marion Lockdown were the sponsors of the protest march, which actually began in Carbondale.

The group started out at the Free Speech Center at the Southern Illinois University-Carbondale where they rallied. From there they marched to the Federal Building and the Post Office.

Boarding four chartered busses the group made its way to the Crab Orchard Lake where they held a rally and ate lunch.

The lake is one bone of contention for the group, which claims that it is actually un-

safe to drink.

Running behind, the group finally arrived at the road leading to the prison, which was blocked by 10 Illinois State



WHO IS THAT? — This protestor preferred to remain anonymous during Saturday's protest at the United State Federal Penitentiary at Marion. One has to wonder, however, how she stayed cool. (Photo by Rob Wick)



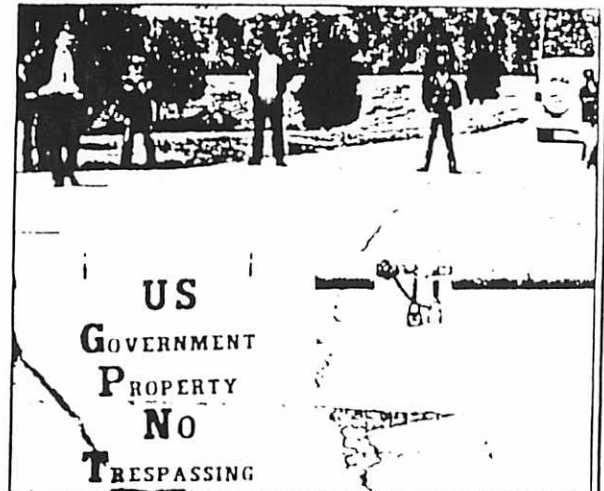
THE ACTION AND THE REACTION — The photo at the left depicts the nearly 200 protestors who peacefully demonstrated at the United States Penitentiary Saturday, while the picture at the right shows what was waiting for the group. The Bureau of Prisons

Police troopers.

It was a hot day for the protest, with the humidity reaching nearly unbearable proportions, but that didn't stop the group from walking down the road leading to the

prison carrying two large signs that said "Stop the Lockdown at Marion Prison" and "Abolish Control Units Everywhere".

Things got a bit testy with some of the local media beforehand though, as Nancy



had closed the gate, and set up the sign telling the group that this was as far as they could go. There were no problems at the demonstration. (Photo by Rob Wick)

Kurshan, of the Committee to End the Marion Lockdown, pushed a cameraman from KFVS-12 out of the way as he was trying to get shots of people coming off the bus.

"I guess she thought I was

FBI or something," he said, even though the letters KFVS are clearly marked on the side of the camera.

Waiting for them at the end of the 3/4 mile lake were offi-

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 cials from the Bureau of Prisons, including Davis, who is executive assistant to Warden Gary Henman.

The BOP had closed the prison gate and put up a large white sign with red letters that said "U.S. Government Property No Trespassing".

The protestors were of every conceivable size, shape, color or age. Many had the appearance of being old enough to have protested America's entry into World War I, while others were in diapers, or not even thought about, when America was in Vietnam.

The majority were college students from around the state, with some wearing tee-shirts emblazoned with the University of Illinois, Eastern Illinois University, and SIU-C.

Some protestors covered their face, although it was unsure if they did so for dramatic effect or to avoid being recognized.

Before the group started, a ceremony was held, mainly in Spanish, by a Catholic priest to bless the event. During this time, a neighbor of the prison, who had put up "No Trespassing" signs all around his home, came down on an All-Terrain Vehicle and forced one of the protesters to stop sitting on his fence.

He then threw a sign on the ground that the protestor had been carrying, and had since put on on the post.

Not all of the protesters were from Chicago. One was from Carterville.

Mike Olivero prefers to call himself a "human-rights activist" and not a revolutionary.

"I have been active in this for a long time," Olivero said. He was wearing the red Arab League Kaffiyeh, or headdress, but his face was still recognizable.

Like the other protesters, Olivero quoted the figure that only 20 percent of the prisoners incarcerated at Marion were actually level 6.

"Even if the prisoners in here are very dangerous, they still deserve to be treated like human beings," Olivero said.

... Davis, speaking, also of the Committee to End the Marion Lockdown, said that he thought the group was going to make a difference.

"Two years ago when we did this, they let out two political prisoners, and so we are hoping to do better this next time," he said.

One of the speakers for the day was Chokwe Lumumba, a leader from the New African movement. Lumumba chastized the prison officials on the other side of the gate, and told the crowd, to great cheers of applause, that this was why American society failed.

Davis held a mini press conference following the demonstration, and re-iterated the position of the prison on the high security status.

"We were concerned about the security of the prison, and those who are there," he said.

He said that while the group "had the right to express their views" the BOP naturally didn't agree with them.

As far as the claim about the twenty percent being below

level six, Davis explained that a prisoner could come from level four or three prison, but he were charged with killing or some other violent act, he would not be reclassified even though he was sent to Marion.

What about the charge that Crab Orchard Lake is harmful?

"We are looking at alternative sources of water all the time," Davis said, "but if didn't think it was safe, do you think I would drink it?"