

NO TOXIC WATER DIETS! END THE MARION LOCKDOWN!

a newsletter prepared by The Committee to End the Marion Lockdown June 1990

The campaign to end the use of toxic water at the United States Penitentiary at Marion exploded the first week of May with activities organized around the country: Portland, San Francisco, Boulder, Madison, Washington, D.C., New York, Hartford, Philadelphia, Chicago and Carbondale/Marion. The activities were so great they fueled our hopes for a nationwide movement, or at least network, of people who would act based on the needs and abilities of local areas, and yet speak with the voice of unity. We hope the short reports and photos that follow of some of the May activities will excite you as much as they do us.

For quite sometime now prisoners at Marion have been writing and petitioning about the use of toxic water from Crab Orchard Lake. CEML has numerous reports documenting the situation. We

won't summarize that information here, but readers who want to know more of the facts about this situation are urged to write us for further details.

During this past winter, CEML decided to launch a concerted campaign to force the Bureau of Prisons (BOP) to change the water supply at Marion. The campaign effort resulted in many educational programs, 6,500 petition signatures from around the country, throughout Europe and as far away as Australia, and a series of demonstrations the first week of May. Thanks to all the many, many friends who were part of that process—petitioning, writing letters, setting up video showings, distributing literature, etc. Without you we could not have done our part.

Madison, Wisconsin

Despite the fact that it was windy, misty and cold, a group of Madisonians spent noontime Friday, May 4th, leafleting the lunch crowd and other passersby on the Capitol square. Several

folks were decked out in sandwich boards. After distributing over 400 leaflets, the group trooped up to Representative Kastenmeier's office, who is the head of the congressional committee charged with overseeing the federal prisons, and presented the boxful of petitions with almost 6,500 signatures. Along with the petitions, the group submitted a list of political prisoners held at Marion and demanded an immediate investigation into their selective mistreatment. Kastenmeier's staff presented the group with a printed statement from the Congressman which indicated that he intended

to visit Marion in the near future. (He and other members of his committee in fact did visit Marion on May 19.) Although the statement was vague and noncommittal, it at least demonstrated the impact of the campaign as Kastenmeier has never before

shown this level of interest in the water or any other issue related to Marion. Earlier that week there was a video showing in the University of Wisconsin Student Union of "Shut Down the Control Units."

San Francisco, California

On Saturday, May 5th, Bay Area activists gathered at Pier 41, where the ferry boats leave for Alcatraz Island, which has become a tourist attraction for all those who want to see the notorious prison. They distributed a mock version of the real Golden Gate National Recreation Area brochure about Alcatraz. More than a thousand pamphlets were passed out between 10:30 and 3:30 pm. Instead of reminiscing about the "good old days" of Alcatraz, the new brochure talked about USP Marion, the modern horror prison. Skip, one of the participants in the Indian occupation of Alcatraz, re-dedicated the land to Native Americans. Ironically, the San Francisco Police

Human Billboard at Crab Orchard Lake: "NO MORE POISON WATER AT MARION PRISON"



and rent-a-cops forced the demonstrators off of Pier 39 and Pier 41's "private property" and into the street. There, Morton Sobell (who spent five

rie Fire Organizing Committee and Freedom Now.

San Francisco: at the ferry to Alcatraz Island



Scott Braley

years at Alcatraz) addressed the crowd of tourists waiting to purchase ferry tickets saying: "I don't understand people in this country. When we were at Alcatraz no one paid much attention to us. Now, everyone wants to go there." Bobby Castillo, of the International Indian Treaty Council, added "If you want to see what a prison's like, go back over to the housing projects where people have to live in concrete boxes. They're built just like prison cells".

A program on April 24th featured Morton Sobell, co-defendant of Ethel and Julius Rosenberg and a political prisoner for 18 years. Bobby Castillo spoke about his experience in the Marion Control Unit prior to the lockdown, where he helped to organize a work stoppage along with Leonard Peltier and other Native American prisoners. Corey Weinstein (physician and consultant to the Prisoners' Rights Union) discussed the danger presented to the prisoners by the toxic water and also revealed information about Pelican Bay — the new California maxi-maxi prison that's opened near the Oregon border. Both the program and the demonstration were sponsored by CEML, John Brown Anti-Klan Committee, Prais-



Religious delegation in front of the Bureau of Prisons; (left to right) Reverend Michael Yasutake, Dir., Interfaith Prisoners of Conscience; Judy Greenspan, National Prison Project, ACLU; Canon Kwasi Thornell, Washington Cathedral; Kathy Flewellan, Assoc. Dir., American Friends Service Committee

Washington, D.C.

A religious delegation, organized by the Rev. Michael Yasutake, Director of the Interfaith Prisoners of Conscience Project of the National Council of Churches, attempted to see J. Michael Quinlan, Director of the BOP, on Friday, May 4, 1990. Despite a great deal of notice, Quinlan, self-proclaimed liberal, would not see the delegation, nor did he arrange for any other ranking member of the Bureau to meet with them. The magnitude of the insult to religious leaders concerned with the situation at Marion is underscored by the fact that accompanying Rev. Yasutake were Ms. Kathy Flewollen, Associate Director of the Washington D.C. office of the American Friends Service Committee, Rev. Canon Kwasi Thornell, Canon Missioner of Washington Cathedral, and Judy Greenspan, representing the ACLU's National Prison Project.

Rev. Yasutake writes of his encounter: "After presenting a staff member with the petitions, I asked for a picture with the BOP staff. The secretary called the public relations officer. He entered and said 'no' to picture taking. When asked whether there was any policy on picture taking, he replied that he 'just didn't want my picture taken with you.' All this refusal for picture taking seems



Boulder, Colorado

David Harrison/Colorado Daily

symbolic of how the BOP would rather operate in the shadow of darkness than the light of day."

After leaving the BOP, the delegation continued on to Congress and met with staff from the offices of both Kastenmeier and Sen. Paul Simon from Illinois.

Boulder, Colorado

On Saturday, May 5th, the Student Coalition for Human Rights and other prison activists walked through the Pearl Street Mall where the Boulder courthouse is located. They carried placards which addressed the water issue, the genocidal imprisonment of people of color, and human rights for political prisoners. The group scattered through the mall and spent time talking with folks about the toxic water at Marion. The flyer distributed pointed out that "the brutal conditions in this Gulag are designed to dehumanize and psychologically destroy prisoners."

Chicago, Illinois

Chanting "TOXIC WATER, WE SAY 'NO' / CRAB ORCHARD LAKE HAS GOT TO GO," approximately eighty people gathered in front of the Federal Building at Jackson and Dearborn on May 3rd at 4:00 to protest the contaminated water at Marion Prison. Though incessant rain kept the demonstration at a moderate size, the torrents failed to dampen the spirits of the activists who dispensed hundreds of flyers to curious passersby in an attempt to raise public awareness of the toxic water and other subhuman conditions at the United States' worst maximum security prison. Sponsored by the Committee to End the Marion Lockdown and the National Committee to Free Puerto Rican Prisoners of War, the demonstration was a preliminary to the overnight bus trip to Marion the next day.

Portland, Oregon

A demonstration was organized at the Federal Building at noon on Thursday, May 3rd where folks carried placards and distributed the Fact Sheet On The Toxic Water. Sponsoring groups included the Leonard Peltier Support Group, United Indian Women, and Matrix. The press release issued stated, "Marion was set up as the U.S.A.'s political prison, now it's a deathtrap too." In addition to placards addressing the water and the lockdown, demonstrators carried a big beautiful "Free Leonard Peltier" banner.

Carbondale/Marion, Illinois

We had a busy two days in Southern Illinois. On Friday, May 4th, a press conference was held at the Interfaith Center in Carbondale generating a good deal of publicity. The press conference

included John McHale of the Mid-American Peace Program, Lourdes Lugo whose uncle, Puerto Rican Prisoner of War Oscar Lopez Rivera, is imprisoned at Marion, Janet Bifield whose husband is also imprisoned at Marion, and CEML member Nancy Kurshan. The press conference was covered by both area newspapers and local radio and tv sta-

Marion Prison," "End the Torture and Brutality at Marion," "Free Puerto Rican Prisoners of War," "End the Marion Lockdown," and others) right to the edge of the highway, others lined up with the human billboard, and still others picketed and petitioned in front of the post office. Several police and onlookers came by to tell us, not always favorably, that word of our presence was spreading through the area by radio and word of mouth.

After a couple of hours, we moved on to a boat dock site by Crab Orchard Lake, also along Route 13. There we took turns holding the banners and human billboards, and had lunch. After a few hours, we moved to our last stop, USP Marion. After departing the buses we marched from the main road to the locked fence, a mile or so away from the prison, where we were forced to hold our rally out of view of the prison and out of earshot of the prisoners. After forming a militant picket line, we heard remarks from representatives of CEML, the National



Paulette D'Auteuil-Robideau

Portland, Oregon

tions. (Readers can obtain a set of clippings by sending a self-addressed, stamped envelope to CEML.)

CEML members made presentations in three classes, spoke at a commemoration of the twentieth anniversary of the rebellion at Southern Illinois University (SIU) which protested the murders of the students at Kent State, and visited the offices of local congressional representative Glen Proschard.

Very early Saturday morning, May 5, demonstrators arrived on the campus of SIU. A delegation arrived on two buses from Chicago and were joined by carloads from St. Louis, Des Moines, and residents of southern Illinois. After refreshing themselves from a long night of travel, the 125 demonstrators set out to inform regional folks about the brutality of Marion prison and the toxic water in particular. The first stop was the post office located along Route 13, the main highway in southern Illinois. Some protestors took the many beautiful banners and placards ("No More Toxic Water at

Committee, Freedom Now, Unity, the Organization of Black Struggle, Prairie Fire Organizing Committee, and organizers from southern Illinois. In addition, messages from prisoners were read.

Most of the speakers took pains to challenge the media that were present around the situation at Marion. Speakers cited two reports documenting



Marina

media to the public. Although the rest of the world is throwing off old forms of oppression, and even South Africa is freeing political prisoners, the US and the BOP are resisting every effort to force them to humanize a vicious and expanding prison system that does nothing but exacerbate the very problems it is allegedly trying to cure. Only mass pressure by the public can change this. The Committee to End the Marion Lockdown is devoted to continuing this pressure. We hope that all of us together can be successful in this effort.

One absolutely essential matter that we must pay attention to in the near future is the proliferation of control unit prisons. When Marion was turned into one big control unit, the BOP claimed that "gathering all the bad apples" in one prison would allow the rest of the US prison system to open up. We in CEML argued that instead Marion would act as an anchor, pulling the system towards more and more repression; Marion would be a model for more control unit prisons. This, unfortunately, is exactly what is happening now. Several states have opened control unit prisons. Among these are California (Pelican Bay), New York (Shawangunk), and Michigan (Ionia). Recently, we learned the BOP is constructing another level 6 prison in Florence, Colorado that will make Marion look mild by comparison. They plan to utilize the most modern high-tech torture techniques at this facility. The proposed prison will be larger than Marion, and prisoners at Marion will be the first to be transferred there.

To say the least, there is a great deal more work to do for those of us who would like to live in a society based upon human values instead of exploitation and oppression.



EXCERPTS FROM A PRISONER'S LETTER

Committee to End the Marion Lockdown:

I want to offer my personal thanks for the efforts and intentions of the organizers and participants in the group which held the demonstration at Marion Prison this last weekend.

I would like to point out several things of interest to you, and I am sure you will not be shocked, or have any doubts about the truth in what I am going to say. First of all, your mailings to prisoners here at the prison, the notice of demonstration and petition was held up by the authorities, until it was impossible to comply with the time factor, to show any support for your most honorable efforts. This is very regrettable, and I offer no apology for myself as a prisoner, but do ask understanding on your part in the sense of trying to understand the simplicity of mind behind such an action.

As a result of your demonstration, which is really an expression of your First Amendment rights, there has been certain repercussions within this prison. That being the authorities thought it best to keep the population in the cells, and not allow the normal hour of exercise or the shower which can be taken during this period.

I ask myself why they would fear such a small group as you kind people. And this is something which makes me very sad and almost lonely within the part of me where I hold hope out of harms way.

I fear at this moment the penalty for my own thoughts and views. I have given expression. This I must do, for within my own mind, there is reason. That being, if you can take the time to come and stand in front of a prison demanding relief for my suffering, I can surely let you know that I gladly stand with you and any actions taken against me because of your demands will be taken well, and my real consolation is in knowing that I am willing to pay in whatever way is deemed necessary for your rights and for your expression of them.

I leave you now but not before saying thank you, to each of you. And perhaps one parting thought, the corrections game has been allowed to grow and keep pace with the class structure. They have developed a taste for the lower or under class of our society and I have always liked to think that sooner or later they will become so obese that society will at last see them as repulsive or they will slowly choke to death on their own appetite.

I greatly respect your devotion and efforts.

Sincerely,
A Prisoner At Marion

For more information, call (312) 663-5046, or write
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