

Break the Chains

Newsletter of the Break the Chains prisoner-support group/Issue #17, Winter, 2004

If you strike at, imprison, or kill us, out of our prisons or graves we will still evoke a spirit that will thwart you, and perhaps, raise a force that will destroy you! We defy you! Do your worst! - **James Connolly**



Inside this issue: Prison is Ground Zero: the Break the Chains Conference; updates on political prisoners and repression; The Prisonification of Indigenous Women; A Struggle on two fronts - prisons & imperialist war.... and much more!

MISSION STATEMENT

The Break the Chains prisoner support group was formed in 2001 to deal with the increasing level of police and state repression directed at the growing anti-capitalist movement on the West Coast. As the repression intensifies, it is more important than ever to support those individuals who have been kidnapped by the state due to their beliefs and actions. While it is important to support political prisoners from around the world, we believe it is necessary to focus our energy and limited resources on those imprisoned in our own region. Although we are primarily an anarchist collective, we are not limiting our support to anarchist prisoners alone. Freedom fighters, eco-defenders, class warriors and individuals who have been framed or wrongly imprisoned for self-defense, all deserve our solidarity. Our goal is to provide financial, emotional, and other forms of support, to our comrades and allies in prison - or facing imprisonment - in our own region. This includes corresponding with prisoners, raising funds through benefits and other means, and spreading awareness by publishing their written works and facts on their situations. We also organize public events such as conferences, forums, lectures, and demonstrations against racism, patriarchy, imperialism, state repression, and the prison system; and for equality, freedom, self-determination, and revolutionary struggle.

BREAK THE CHAINS

PO Box 12122
Eugene, OR 97440

Website: www.breakthechains.net

Email: breakthechains02@yahoo.com

Women's Committee: breakthechains03@yahoo.com

ORDERING INFORMATION

Subscriptions to this newsletter are free to all prisoners in California, Idaho, Nevada, Oregon, and Washington, and to women prisoners of any state. One-year subscriptions to the newsletter are \$6 to other prisoners, and \$12 to people on the outside. Individual copies are \$2 postage paid. Please contact us for information on how to order back issues or copies in bulk. Checks [made out to "Break the Chains"], and well-concealed cash, can be sent to the address above. We also accept payments in postage.

A note to prisoners: Please keep us informed if you are transferred or released, this way we don't lose money by continuing to send mail to out-of-date addresses.

EDITORIAL

It has been over three months since the conference took place, and Break the Chains is just now beginning to return to a normal routine. But because the conference was such a large part of this year's work, I'd like to throw out some of my own thoughts about it. First, I'd like to say how proud I am of myself and the other collective members for pulling this thing off. There were days when I really thought we couldn't do it - then, we did - but it wasn't perfect to say the least.

For example, our brochure clearly advertised bathrooms for trans-gendered folks and they were somehow forgotten. I feel that this was a great failure in the conference organizing. In addition, where were the people of color? Or at least, that was the question I kept asking myself. Where are the people of color? But at some point, I realized how irrelevant that question truly is, because my job as an anti-racist ally is not to organize a conference, and hope that folks of color show up.

My job is to help make seldom heard voices heard and to challenge other white folks on their own privilege. So, the real question should be "Where was our anti-racist training?" At a conference focused on prison issues and state repression - shouldn't race and privilege be at the forefront of discussion? My friend Laurie loved the conference, but was eager to point out that we were missing a heavy duty anti-racism workshop - dealing with the dangers of a prison abolitionist movement with whites in the spotlight. Some folks have talked down on the notion of an anti-racist training, saying that we had "plenty of native folks." Without getting into the particulars of tokenizing, I think many white anarchists really need to think about how they appropriate from indigenous peoples. Just because we claim to believe in armed struggle doesn't make us any better than the white guy next door with crystals and a dream catcher hanging from the mirror of his Camry. Got me?

Overall, conference reviews have been positive but still, some folks have complained that there were not enough "anarchist" presenters. While I think the complaint is self marginalizing, I'd like to acknowledge that I am taking it seriously. That said...can any one offer up some names of anarchists that they would have liked to have seen at a prison conference? Not an anarchist conference, a prison conference. It has also been suggested that our conference put numerous Marxists on a pedestal, "beyond criticism."

Interestingly, while Break the Chains did invite several self-proclaimed Marxists to present, over 75% of the conference presenters are without political affiliation and the other 25% are roughly split between Anarchists and Communists and none of our speakers are beyond criticism, ever.

With the conference being over, the BTC collective is revamping itself and getting ready for another rainy, Eugene winter. We will continue to do support for eco-defense political prisoner Jeffrey "Free" Luers, American Indian political prisoner Eddie Hatcher, the women at Coffee Creek, the Children of the river, and many other friends and comrades who remain behind bars. We now have an office space at the Grower's Market building, and we're confident this will help us become more organized and inclusive in our efforts.

In addition to correspondence, maintaining our list-serves and website, tabling and doing grunt work, some recent BTC activities include: hosting American Indian prison abolition activists, Stormy Ogden and Chrystos for a series of events about Native people in prison and the connection between prisons and colonialism. These events took place on October 13th & 14th. We organized these events in collaboration with the University of Oregon and Lane Community College Multi-Cultural Center groups. We've also done presentations on different prison issues at various community events, and as always we're trying to form alliances with proactive groups and strengthen our ties with those who are already our allies.

In the future, we intend to revamp our correspondence projects. We are starting a birthday project with the aim of compiling a list of birthdays for all political and revolutionary prisoners [so people can send them cards and gifts when their special day comes around]. We also have plans to initiate a new series of campaigns to strengthen support for Jeff "Free" Luers, and, perhaps mostly importantly, we'll be helping Thomas Tripp adjust to life on the outside when he is released from prison later this month [after having spent years in Oregon prisons for both non-political and political activities].

We hope you enjoy this issue of our newsletter. Please contact us if you have any questions, suggestions, comments, or concerns. We're always happy to hear from like-minded individuals.

**Lily for the BTC collective,
November, 2003**

Most of the artwork in this issue was taken from <http://www.etext.org/Politics/MIM/art/index.html> - the art section of the Maoist Internationalist Movement website. Use of this artwork does NOT imply affiliation or endorsement of MIM.

BTC MAIL ORDER

We finally have a catalogue of literature available. Most of the literature is of the anarchist, prison abolitionist, and anti-imperialist variety. We sincerely apologize to those who previously requested our catalogue but did not receive one. Some of our literature is free to prisoners. Most items are cheap. Though no one's request will be denied, please send us a few stamps when ordering if you can.

PEN-PAL PROGRAM

After months of delays due to our busyness, we are finally able to resume our pen-pal program. A pen-pal manual, complete with contact info and short biographies for prisoners looking for correspondence - and an introductory essay for those on the outside interested in corresponding with prisoners - is available from us free of cost. A more up-to-date manual will be produced in early 2004. Prisoners who are looking for correspondence should send us a 25-75 word self-description and their contact info. Please be honest about your intentions. It's okay if you're looking for romantic correspondence, but this is not a dating service. And please don't bother submitting your info if you have a racist, sexist, or homophobic mentality, or if you're merely looking for a "sugar-mama" or "sugar papa". We prefer submissions from politically conscious and active prisoners.

A few friends & allies

Prison Art Project

P.O. Box 31574
San Francisco, CA 94131-0574
Website: www.prisonart.org

They publish the wonderful *Prison Art Newsletter*, which is free to prisoners, and they sell prisoner arts and crafts over the internet. Contact them if you'd like to receive their newsletter, or if you want to sell your arts and crafts over the internet.

Howl for Freedom

PO Box 3
Eugene, OR 97440
Website: www.freefreenow.org

This is the primary support group for eco-defense political prisoner Jeff Luers, AKA Free, who's serving an outrageous 22-year prison sentence for burning three SUVs to protest the destruction of the environment. Stickers, publications, and other literature about him are available through them and us.

Anarchist Black Cross Network

Website: www.anarchistblackcross.org
ABCN is a network of anarchist collectives that support social and political prisoners, and fight against repression, and for the abolition of prisons.

Anarchist Black Cross Federation

Website: www.abcf.net
ABCF is a national federation formed over a decade ago to support political prisoners and prisoners of war.

PRISON IS GROUND ZERO:

In August I attended an intense three-day weekend at the Break the Chains Conference in Eugene, Oregon. If only all of our gatherings could be organized this well, have this great an attendance, and contain as much solid content as this one did. A big hats off to Lydia, Brenton and the whole Break The Chains gang of hard workers who put this event together. Each day there were workshops held at the University of Oregon, and each evening there were off-campus events where activists in the prison abolition movement gave talks. Here is the preamble to the conference:

"Perhaps no other single issue so convincingly illustrates the inter-connectedness of the struggle for total liberation as does the prison-industrial complex. Resisting prisons is resisting state repression and blatant social control; it is resisting the most terrifying examples of racism, sexism, and homophobia, the criminalization of the poor and capitalist exploitation of labor. For this reason, the Break the Chains Conference hopes to exemplify the need for continued and heightened prisoner support with our ultimate goal being prison abolition. Prison abolition is a political vision that seeks to eliminate prisons and acknowledges the devastating effects that prisons have on poor, marginalized, and politicized communities. Prisoner support, for both social and political prisoners, means learning from the incarcerated, making their voices heard and their existence visible and meaningful.

"The Break The Chains Conference is dedicated to fighting repression, supporting prisoners, and eliminating prisons altogether. By providing anti-prison education, building on existing prisoner support efforts, learning from veteran prison activists, and initiating new campaigns against the prison industrial complex, we want to use this conference to initiate a new era of heightened prisoner support and anti-prison activism.

"We feel that the prisoner support and prisoner resistance movements, by virtue of their broad-based nature, offer one of the best starting to points to begin to dismantle the webs of power."

On the opening night of the Break The Chains Conference there were lectures by Ward Churchill, Native American author. Ward is a former chairperson of the Leonard Peltier Defense Committee, veteran American Indian Movement [AIM] activist, and author, co-author or editor of over a dozen books about Native American struggles for liberation, movement strategy, and the politics of imprisonment. Safiya Bukhari was scheduled to speak but came down with what was to become a terminal illness.

On Saturday night there were presentations by Chrystos, a writer and artist. Her work as a Native land and treaty rights activist has been widely recognized and the political aspect is an essential part of her writing - even though she refuses to be taken as a "voice" of Native women or as a "spiritual leader." Also speaking, Leslie Bull, an activist, writer, speaker, photographer, poet, and performer living in Portland, Oregon. Sharing her experiences as a white girl, street hooker, homeless junkie, prisoner family, survivor, and now graduate student in fine arts at Antioch University, Leslie calls herself a compulsive truth teller in her writing.

On Sunday night Laura Whitehorn took the stage. Laura is a revolutionary anti-imperialist who spent over fourteen years in federal prison, charged with a series of property bombings that protested police brutality and U.S. foreign policy. Released in August, 1999, she currently lives in New York City and works toward the release of political prisoners incarcerated in the United States. Ed Mead, this writer, followed Laura. What the literature said about me was that I was a "former political prisoner of the George Jackson Brigades, the co-founder of Prison Legal News, organizer of Men Against Sexism (a group that militantly opposed sexism, racism, homophobia and rape) inside the walls of the Washington State Penitentiary at Walla Walla" etc. Laura and I were billed as "Enemies of The State."

Almost every night there was the talking was followed by the great by a musical performance with Jim Page. Jim has been on the scene for more than twenty years and his reputation continues to grow. Often cited for his biting political pieces he is in constant demand by the social movements of the day.

The crown jewel of this event was not the nightly speechifying by movement luminaries, however, but by the daily workshops on all aspects of the prison experience. I did one on the history of Men Against Sexism, other workshops included The Struggle Against Prison, Repression, and Social Control; The Jericho Movement & the Struggle to Free Political Prisoners; Women In Prison/Free Battered Women Now; Connecting the Dots: From COINTELPRO to the Patriot Act; Support Prisoners: Make your own tattoo gun; Chemical Prison: The Merger of the Psychiatric and Prison Industries, and many, many more. All of the workshops were well attended. There were four or five others going on at the same time mine was scheduled. I thought sure I would be alone in that big room, but it was full, with people sitting on the floor. The others were all full too: A great Conference.

Let me close this off with a quote from the Manifesto for the Break The Chains Conference. It does a better job of laying it on the line than I could have done:

The Break the Chains Conference

"To struggle against the prison system is to struggle against capitalism. Both are dependent upon prejudice and hierarchal power relations, which serve to keep people divided and to rationalize and legitimate the oppression and exploitation of a given group of people.

"Capitalism cannot exist without the existence of a massive prison complex for several reasons. The first reason being that a system such as capitalism, with its dependency on exploitation and imperialism, needs to create an effective deterrent to opposition; prisons serve this purpose they serve to terrorize and intimidate the opponents of capitalist brutality with the threat of imprisonment, and all the suffering that implies. Prisons are used as efficient tools of class society (capitalism) in other ways; prisons can be and all too often are used to warehouse oppressed peoples and those deemed undesirable by the capitalist system. These imprisoned "undesirables" make ideal workers for capitalist enterprises because they have little or no rights - they're forced to be obedient providers of cheap labor.

"The anti-prisons movement is increasingly anti-capitalist precisely because prison growth is the logical outcome of the capitalist system. Likewise, the anti-capitalist movement is increasingly focused on prison issues because within prison wall's, are masses of dissatisfied people who have become politically conscious and are searching for resistance movements to become part of. If the anti-capitalist movement can form alliances with politicized prisoners, its likelihood of succeeding is far greater.

"We are organizing this conference to educate people about the bleak reality of the prison crisis, to mobilize people from the anti-repression, prisoner-support, anti-authoritarian, and anti-capitalist movements, to humbly host like-minded activists from other regions in what we hope is to be an extremely powerful and productive convergence, to learn from survivors of the prison system and gain from them invaluable lessons about the nature of the beast we are up against, and to begin the difficult task of developing a cohesive, organized, diverse, and effective movement against state repression and the politics of mass imprisonment.

As the ruling elite intensifies it's repression more and more broadly, such a movement becomes necessary now more than ever before."

You on the inside should know that there are those of us out here working to crush the worst manifestation of the state's apparatus of repression - the prisons. We can support you, but ultimately you must be your own liberators.

By Ed Mead

A complete compilation of reports and analysis of the conference [pro & con], and related documents, will be available from us in 2004. This pamphlet will be available free to prisoners and \$4 or trade to everyone else. In the meantime, copies of the BTC Conference manual, complete with workshop descriptions and solidarity statements from prisoners, is available free of cost to prisoners and \$1 for everyone else. Also, cool Break the Chains Conference shirts are available from us for only \$6.

**FIGHTING
IMPERIALISM**



**IS NOT
TERRORISM**

Jeff "Free" Luers has been released from the hole, but "it's time to struggle like never before."

Dispatch 9/03:

Hello everyone. I have good news to share. On 9/10 I was released from segregation. I have not had an opportunity to speak with my attorney so I'm not sure what I can share. However, I would like to extend my deepest thanks to Lauren Regan, AAL and her legal assistant, Misha Dunlap for their awesome help. They put in a lot of time into getting me out of the hole - taking time from their busy lives to come to visit and talk strategy with me. Thank you.

As of right now, I've been out for 5 days. I have been given my job back on the yard and I'm working on getting my old housing back in the worker's housing which gives me a bigger cell.

Yesterday, I had an interesting conversation with a prison friend. He told me that I need to mellow out and just do my time - and that I can't win against these people. I get that a lot from folks - even from supporters on the outs.

Revolution is a way of life. It is not one act of resistance. Who we are, how we live - will decide the future. I play many roles in my life. I am a son, a brother, an uncle, a best friend and a prisoner. But before every one of those, I am a warrior. I live my entire life in resistance to the mindless destruction of this society.

Because in every role we play, we must be revolutionary. How can we change things if we do not change ourselves? We must rid ourselves of the oppressor within and that starts with our personal relationships. It starts with how we choose to live.

I came to prison for the way I lived my life. I challenged the system and its allies in every fashion - from dialogue to action. It is who I am. I will not cower before repression; I will not leave the side of our animal relations. I will not be silenced in my defense of Mother Earth. I am alive and strong and I will fight because the spirit is with me.

I did not leave this at the prison gates. My spirit is as strong and defiant as ever. I will always struggle with every means available to me - as all we must. And with my dying breath, I will cry for freedom if I must.

It is our warrior spirit that makes us strong. It is our willingness to struggle to the end, never giving up that will see us through. Against all odds, we must stand strong and united, courageous with the belief that our spirits can not be broken. We stand with the strength of Mother Earth, with the strength of all our animal brothers and sisters and the web of life. We stand with the strength and warrior spirit of our ancestors who fought against oppression and for their sacred lands. We are all descendents of ancient cultures that live in harmony and balance with the Earth.

Thousands of years of genocide and assimilation have brought us to where we are. It is time each of us remembers our collective past. It is time each of us renew our oath to the web of life. We must rekindle the flames of our warrior spirit.

Each generation has a responsibility to make things better for the next. My sisters and brothers, it is time to unite. It is time to rise. It is time to fight like we've never fought before. We must challenge this system and all its sickness on every front.

Against all odds we must win,

Jeff "Free" Luers

Jeffrey Luers #13797671, OSP, 2605 State St., Salem, OR 97310

Dispatch 10/03:

I've been putting this update off for more than 2 weeks now because I just really haven't wanted to deal with what I'm about to write. I figure that sitting here in my cell sick, my mood can't really get worse so it is the perfect time to write. [By the way, for those who know me personally and are prone to worry, I've just got a cold and I'll be fine J].

All right, let's get right to it. About 2 ½ weeks ago, I received the state's response to my brief (Ed note: appeal). To start, my first brief was denied for being too long. The court held me to 50 pages. The state's brief is 64 pages long-apparently they do not share the same constraints. In the first 16 pages, the state calls me a terrorist twice and does so 3 more times throughout the brief. They refer heavily to my political beliefs and writings as well as reading material I owned on revolution and military handbooks - the same used to train the US military. Throughout the brief, I am compared, through innuendo to al-Qaeda and my conviction for Tyree Oil is compared to planting a nuclear bomb in a crowded city.

It is greatly disturbing to me that these allegations were not even raised during my trial. Sure, references were made in trial, to the Earth Liberation Front (ELF). However, I was never called a terrorist. The use of these allegations now appear not only to be use of emotionally charged words to sway my appeal but fare more maliciously seem to be laying the groundwork for labeling me as a "dangerous terrorist threat".

The "dangerous terrorist threat" label can, under current laws, effectively give me life in prison. The US government has the authority to refuse release to anyone they deem to be in this category.

Though I must admit, I'm prone to believing the worst. I find it difficult to believe it is coincidence that 4 months ago, I was written up by ODOC [Editor note: Oregon Department of Corrections] for being a member of the ELF - a "domestic terrorist" group - in essence - called a leader and labeled as putting the general public at risk. Now, again the same thing is happening in a court document.

I cannot attempt to describe the anger and heartbreak I felt as I read the state's brief. Heartbreak, because do not believe that I will leave prison and anger because I am powerless to do anything about it.

I'm sitting here looking at my pictures I keep on the wall. I see my family and my friend. I'm looking at the handful of people I love more than life itself. As I look at them, I know I may never see them again outside a visiting room. I may never see them in the light of a campfire or cook food with them.

They say I'm dangerous. It's not my actions or my words that make me dangerous. What makes me dangerous is that no matter what they do, I will not bow my head. I will not say they are right because they aren't right. I will never let go of my beliefs. I will never stop believing in equality and freedom. I'll never stop believing we are all children of the Earth. I'll never stop believing that we can do better than this. That's what makes me dangerous - my will cannot be broken. If they can't break mine, they can't break yours, and if they can't break yours, they can't break ours. If our will cannot be broken - if we refuse to give up - then we will win. And that's what makes us dangerous - we will never stop believing a better world is possible.

Jeff "Free" Luers

Statement on Sherman Austin from the Los Angeles Anarchist Black Cross Federation

On September 3rd 2003, a grave injustice will take place by the hands of the United States of America. For the next year, Sherman Austin will be imprisoned because of the United States government's fear of free speech in America.

For decades, the American government has targeted those who dare to question its policies. It has attacked and eliminated those who have directly opposed, through their voice or through direct action, an unfair and unjust colonial and racist society.

From people organizing to feed poor children in churches during the 1960s to people typing on the Internet in the present day, any form of action that struggles for community empowerment and self-determination of oppressed people throughout the world is seen as criminal in the eyes of the United States government.

Sherman Austin, through his web-site, chose to speak out against injustices throughout the world. Austin encouraged people to join the resistance against any and all unfair and unjust systems and because of this he has become a target of the United States government.

Sherman's case illustrates the random and arbitrary ability of the US government to trump up charges and persecute anyone it determines as a threat. This should not be viewed merely as a warning but rather an indication of the next stages of American domestic and foreign policy towards those who even dare to question the actions of the American government.

It is for these reasons we recognize Sherman Austin as a political prisoner under the definition used by this organization. Sherman Austin has been "incarcerated for actions carried out in support of legitimate struggles for self-determination [and] for opposing the illegal policies of the government or its political subdivisions." This definition is consistent with the definition created by the Special International Tribunal on the Violation of Human Rights of Political Prisoners and Prisoners of War in the United States Prisons and Jails, December, 1990.

If we do not take a stand and fight against the actions being carried out against Sherman Austin and others like him, we are condoning the actions of our oppressors and allowing the United States to eliminate what little freedom we have left. As present New Afrikan Prisoner of War, Ojore Lutalo states, "Any movement that does not support its political internees, is a sham movement."

We ask all those who take a stand against injustice, to observe the injustice being done against Sherman Austin and the rest of the Political Prisoners. We demand action in their name. Free All Political Prisoners!

The Struggle Continues,
LA-ABCF
PO Box 11223
Whittier, CA 90609
<http://www.abcf.net>

Oregon Department of Corrections punishes those who challenge it

A PRISONER OF THE Oregon Department of Corrections (ODOC), Brian McCarvill recently filed suit against the ODOC because they continually denied Brian reading materials of a radical/anarchist nature. Brian contended that free speech rights were being stifled and the ODOC was mistakenly labeling those with radical politics as "gang related". After settling the lawsuit, the ODOC chose to punish Brian for his challenge by transferring him out of the Oregon State Penitentiary in Salem to the Twin Rivers Correctional Facility in Umatilla.

Due to this retaliatory transfer, Brian has lost his job, many of his belongings, access to dental care he was about to receive, and, as he has no money or way of making any now, he can't afford Advil to help control his back pain. Brian has for years suffered serious back pain (from two slipped disks, and calcium build-ups over fracture trauma). He has been sent to a prison where there are no chairs in the dayroom with back-supports. ODOC has, in Brian's words, "full knowledge" of this situation. Brian is also attempting to get dentures - he hasn't had any teeth at all since November 2002. Work was scheduled begin on these dentures late May at Oregon State Penitentiary. No work on dentures is done at TRCI, so it is possible that the authorities will move him yet again. It is imperative that Brian is transferred back to Oregon State Penitentiary.

Prisoners have very few rights, and when Brian stood up to defend his, the ODOC seemed to work with him, and then slapped him down.

We're asking people to write to the ODOC and demand that Brian be moved back to the Oregon State Penitentiary and that the ODOC cease its harassment of him.

Write to:

Ben de Haan
ODOC Interim Director
Oregon Department of Corrections
Central Administration Office
2575 Center Street NE
Salem, Oregon 97301-4667
Tel: 503-945-9090
Fax: 503-373-1173
Email: DOC.Info@doc.state.or.us

Also, please write to Brian to find out how you can help him:

Brian McCarvill
#11037967, TRCI,
82911 Beach Access Rd.,
Umatilla, OR 97882

A web profile on Brian is now available on the Break the Chains website [www.breakthechains.net], for updates about Brian, contact breakthechains02@yahoo.com

Shut down all Control Units!

Control Unit prisons confine people to small cells in isolation for long periods of time. These prisons were first officially used in Alcatraz and then in 1972 in Marion, Illinois to house prisoners who were "institutional problems" or "too dangerous." Since then the idea has spread, and control units have become a common tool of repression throughout the American prison system.

These control units are used for the political and social control of prisoners already locked in secure institutions. They target Black, Latino and indigenous people who are a disproportionate part of control unit populations (relative to their already disproportionate representation in prisons in general). Control units go beyond the usual constraints of maximum security prisons. Better defined as a prison within a prison, control units are used to defeat prisoners' revolutionary attitudes, organization, militancy, legal and administrative challenges, and anything else the prison administrators deem objectionable. While conditions vary from prison to prison, the goal of these units is always to achieve the spiritual, psychological and physical breakdown of the prisoner.

Control units have various names such as Adjustment Center, Security Housing Unit (SHU), Maximum Control Complex (MCC), administrative maximum (ad-max), Intensive Management Unit (IMU) and administrative segregation (ad-seg). Prisoners spend years of isolation in tiny cells, usually 6 by 8 feet for 22 - 23.5 hours a day. In some cases the long term isolation is complete, in others it is small group isolation; both conditions are tremendously damaging to humans. The short time that they do spend outside their cell is within a cement or chain link "dog pen" that lacks any kind of equipment and proper space for physical exercise. Participation in programs including religious services, educational programs, work and job training, congregate dining and exercise are all prohibited. Medical care is also greatly limited.

Control units may vary from prison to prison but they can be generally characterized as: Permanently designated prisons or cells in prisons that lock prisoners up in solitary or small group confinement for 22 or more hours a day with no congregate dining, exercise or other services, and virtually no programs for prisoners. Prisoners are placed in control units for extended periods of time.

Prisoners are usually placed in control units as an administrative measure, with no clear rules governing the moves. This makes it virtually impossible for prisoners to challenge their placement.

Control units are designed to administer the very most in sensory deprivation and dehumanization of inmates. The United Nations has put forward clear documents outlining acceptable treatment of prisoners. These documents reaffirm that prisoners retain fundamental human rights. The Basic Principles for the Treatment of Prisoners (1990) states: "Except for those limitations that are demonstrably necessitated by the fact of incarceration, all prisoners shall retain the human rights and fundamental freedoms set out in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and, where the State concerned is a party, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the Optional Protocol thereto, as well as such other rights as are set out in other United Nations covenants." The United Nations Human Rights Committee has further stressed the obligation of the state to treat prisoners with dignity and allowing them all rights set forward in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (which the United States signed in 1977).

Control units are physical and mental torture and they very clearly violate the human rights of prisoners. They systematically target prisoners who are challenging the legal system and other manifestations of state authority. We, the signatories of this statement, condemn these units and demand that the United States abide by the UN principles it claims to uphold. We call for the elimination of all control units in prisons in the United States.

Signed by:

- African Peoples Solidarity Committee
- Austin Anarchist Black Cross
- Barrio Defense Committee
- Break the Chains Collective
- Prison Reform Unity Project
- Maoist Internationalist Movement
- Queers for Peace and Justice
- And many others

Send your signature to MIM at mim124@mim.org or MIM, PO Box 40799, San Francisco, CA 94140.



Women's Corner

A regular feature of Break the Chains newsletter; produced by the Wild Flowers women prisoner support committee. For more info, contact: breakthechains03@yahoo.com



Messages of Condolences on the Transition of Our Revolutionary Sista, Comrade, & Friend – Safiya Bukhari

By Assata Shakur, Havana Cuba – August 29, 2003

It is with much sadness that I say my last goodbye to Safiya Bukhari. She was my sister, my comrade and my friend. We met nearly thirty-five years ago, when we were both members of the Black Panther Party in Harlem. Even then, I was impressed by her sincerity, her commitment and her burning energy.

She was a descendent of slaves and she inherited the legacy of neo-slavery. She believed that struggle was the only way that African people in America could rid our selves of oppression. As a Black woman struggling in America she experienced the most vicious forms of racism, sexism, cruelty and indifference. As a political activist she was targeted, persecuted, hounded and harassed. Because of her political activities she became a political prisoner and spent many years in prison. But she continued to believe in freedom, and she continued to fight for it. In spite of her personal suffering, in spite of chronic, life-threatening illnesses, she continued to struggle.

She gave the best that she had to give to our people. She devoted her life, her love and her best energies to fighting for the liberation of oppressed people. She struggled selflessly, she could be trusted, she was consistent, and she could always be counted to do what needed to be done. She was a soldier, a warrior-woman who did everything she could to free her people and to free political prisoners.

Her absence will be felt. She will be sincerely missed. I have faith that the Ancestors will welcome her, cherish her, and treat her with more love and more kindness that she ever received here on this earth. I pray that her sisters and brothers, who continue to walk on this planet, will honor her memory by continuing her work, by continuing her struggle, and refusing to quit until all oppressed people and all Political Prisoners are free.

Statement on Safiyah Bukhari by Marilyn Buck

Safiyah Bukhari is a sister whose life has been an example of the possibilities of change. She began from a world view that people suffer because of lack of initiative. When faced with the reality of Harlem, she responded, changed her world view and struggled to change the world.

Her courage and determination were magnificent. As a sister political prisoner in the 1970's, we shared our experiences from our respective camps. There were moments when she reinforced my own will to remain steadfast, not to turn back to my own way out - white skin privilege.

Then we were both free, both in the struggle in minimum security. Safiyah never lost her focus on the prize - national liberation and freedom for all political prisoners and POWs. Many people have come and gone in supporting the freedom of political prisoners and POWs, never Safiyah. She was a flag on the mountain and in the deserts.

Her loss is devastating to me personally and I believe to all POWs and political prisoners. I hope that there will be others who step forward to stand in her place. She would want that I believe: to look out from her place among the fallen and ancestors; to smile and whisper on the wind, carry on the struggle, comrades.

With love and great respect,
Marilyn Buck
FCI Dublin

Marilyn Buck Denied Parole!

Political prisoner Marilyn Buck made her first appearance before the parole board on September 8, 2003. She was denied parole. She was given what is called a "15-year hit", meaning that she is not eligible to re-appear for another 15 years. She was very strong and articulate in the hearing and continues to inspire us with her dedication and principles.

Write to:

Marilyn Buck
#00482-285, Unit B,
5701 8th St, Camp Parks,
Dublin, California 94568

Outside contact:

Friends of Marilyn Buck
1540 Market #490,
San Francisco, CA 94102
fombuck@yahoo.com

The Prisonification of Indian Women

By Stormy Ogden

*In the warmth of my fantasy
I awake to the cold gray walls
Of my reality*

These words echoed in my mind as the Judge read the sentence, "Ms Ogden, you are to be sentenced for a period of 5 years to be served at the California Rehabilitation Center located in Norco." My reality is becoming devastatingly more common among the women of the United States. Women are the fastest growing segment of the prison population especially in California, which now has the distinction of having the most women prisoners in the nation. Historically, the most brutal methods of social control are directed at a society's most oppressed groups. And the most brutal form of social control in the United States is the state and federal prison system. The ones that are most likely to be sent to jail and prison are the poor and/or women of color. In North America a very high proportion of these people are American Indians.

The number of American Indian prisoners, especially the women, is nearly impossible to obtain. The major reason is the prison classification system that in the majority of prisons classifies prisoners as White, Black, Hispanic, or Other.

Located outside the door to my room was a small white 8x5 card that listed my last name, Ogden, my state number, W-20170, and my classification, Other. Every morning as I left for my job assignment, I would cross out Other and write AI. Then each afternoon when I returned for count there would be a new card with Other written on it. This went on for a few days when finally the CO approached me, "next time, Ogden, it will be a write up and a loss of good time." That next morning, before going to work, I found a permanent laundry marker, tore the card off the wall, and wrote on the wall, American Indian.

Women in prison are fighting to maintain a sense of self within a system that isolates and degrades, a system that is designed to punish. But, for the American Indian woman, we must also fight for our identity.

I write this as a California Indian woman, a tribal woman of Yokuts and Pomo ancestry. I also write as an ex-prisoner of the state of California and a survivor of colonization by the European powers. The history of colonization is a tragic one from the time of European contact to the present day.

The colonizers brought with them two tools of mass destruction, the bottle and the bible, both which were forced upon the Native people. The outcome was the erosion of peoples' language, culture, life-ways, religion, land base and lives. Their traditional ways of behavior and conduct became illegal. With increased attacks on Indian sovereignty and culture, imprisonment became the government's principal means of intimidation and punishment. As stated by Professor Luana Ross in her book: *Inventing the Savage: the Social Construction of Native American Criminality* "Through various procedures, state and

federal governments defined Native Americans as 'deviant' and 'criminal.'"

Almost every aspect of life of Indian people has been subjected to the unrestricted jurisdiction of the United States. The history of relations between Indian nations and the United States has been marked by oppressive laws and policies designed to undermine the sovereignty of Indian nations and to weaken their culture. These laws were geared towards the total annihilation and then assimilation of Indian people into the mainstream dominant society. Native people have been imprisoned in many different forms, such as, Military forts, Missions, reservations, Boarding schools, and now the State and

Federal prisons. These can only be instruments of racism and a form of social control.

The criminalization and imprisonment of Native people can be interpreted as yet another attempt to control Indian lands and the ongoing attempt to deny Indian sovereignty, as we see by the alarming number of Native people that are being locked up on their own ancestral homelands. No Native person can ever forget that his or her homeland was taken and that they live in poverty on the margin of society, desperately fighting to hold on to their traditional ways of life. Keeping this in mind, it can be said that the Prison Industrial Complex was built right through the lives and the ancestral lands of the Indigenous people of this continent.

This article was reprinted from issue #23 [Winter 2002-2003] of The Fire Inside, the newsletter of California Coalition for Women in Prison. For more info on CCWP, write to: California Coalition for Women Prisoners 1540 Market St., Suite 490, San Francisco, CA 94102. Email: info@womenprisoners.org

"It should be clear to anyone that Native peoples are repressed more so than anyone else, that genocide has been practiced against them more so than any people who still exist as a people. Well that means we got to defend them - fight alongside of them just like they fought alongside the slaves. People shouldn't be able to forget for a moment that this land was under the guardianship of Native Americans for centuries before anyone else arrived. Anyway, the way to start is by recognizing if you're supporting land and liberation for Native Americans, you're anti-imperialist and should be in a movement that recognizes and includes that and if there's no movement - well, you got to build one."

Kuwasi Balagoon
May 2, 1984.

[Kuwasi Balagoon was a New Afrikan anarchist revolutionary, and bi-sexual, who died a political prisoner, as a result of an AIDS-related illness, on December 13, 1986.]

WE CUT OFF OUR HAIR

as our children kill themselves at
fourteen or seventeen
in mass explosions
one after another until ten or
twenty three
are dead
on one reservation after another
multiplied across our land
Breathing this colonized air they
take poison
into their hearts listening for the
message
of genocide so much easier when
we do it to ourselves
& save whites the trouble
Grief cuts out our hearts & laughs
din of this cruel survival breath to
breath
going on through this pain we
know strips us
crushes us beneath bulldozers &
booze
We pray for you our children
LIVE
Become the river of our continuing
hoop
LIVE
Become the breath of our never
silent drums
LIVE
Become the future red &
remembered
LIVE
Become our voices singing up the
sun
LIVE
By Chrystos

This poem was taken from her book *Dream On*, which was published in 1991. Copies of her book *Fire Power* are available for \$12 postage-paid from Break the Chains for a limited time. Order a copy today!



I had to quit my job

My job was to print all of the inmate's photos from both of the Coffee Creek facilities. My boss came to me last week with a brand new wonderful idea about how to store all of the pictures on my computer (right now they are stored by date). I recently got a new computer. When ISSD set it up they locked me out of a lot of features I used to have access to. They transferred all of the data from the old hard drive to the new and also burned it all on to some CDs for my boss and Security/ Administration. Security took a look at what was on the CD and decided they didn't like the fact that they couldn't just key in on an inmates SID number and bring up every picture that person has taken during their incarceration. Every picture including visiting photos - think about that for a minute. Every inmate will have a folder made - with the name being the inmates SID number. Inside the folder will be every picture the inmate has taken. Guess who they wanted to take on this task of turning people into numbers, and filing them away for easy perusal by state employees, law enforcement, DOC and anyone else who happens to be around. Yep, Laura Maca herself. Why would they need to look at and be messing around with our photos? I asked my boss and after a whole lot of bullshitting and beating around the bush, she comes up with ...well, maybe after you're released you might get into some trouble and the police will contact DOC for a picture of you. This new system will make it much easier for them to track you. Oh well, when you put it that way, FUCK NO! There is no reason they would need a picture of me and my children, or me and my parents for that. That is what mug-shots are for and they have plenty of those as is. There should be a disclaimer on our photo order forms that all of our photos are being stored and may be used against you, your friends, and your family as we deem necessary for all eternity. So, I had to quit my job.

By Laura Maca

Write to:

Laura Maca
#12404727,
PO BOX 9000,
Wilsonville, OR 97070

12

HOW WOULD YOU FEEL IF THIS WERE YOUR SISTER?

FOR TWENTY FOUR YEARS, I have been in prison. I am a battered woman who survived an abusive relationship in the most terrible way possible. I am now a prisoner in the state penitentiary, serving a term of 7 years to life for my involvement in the conspiracy to kill my abusive husband. When I stood trial in 1977, neither Domestic Violence nor Battered Woman Syndrome was even recognized. I was not allowed to tell the jury about the horrific abuse that my husband inflicted on me and the children, so of course, the jury convicted me of murder. The jury was never told that I was a battered woman acting in defense of myself and my children.

FOR SIXTEEN YEARS, my husband punched, kicked, choked, tortured, and raped me. I was stabbed, assaulted with guns, thrown from moving cars, and terrorized daily. A bad day at work for my husband meant a beating for me. My husband would wake me in the middle of the night by pointing a loaded gun at my head and say, "Beg, bitch, beg if you want to live." I was so frightened of this man, that on one occasion, when he came into my hospital room, I actually tried to jump out of the window.

My life was that of a captured, tortured animal, but the real tragedy is not what happened to me; it is the things that were done to my 3 children. My husband beat, molested, raped, sodomized, and emotionally abused our sons and daughter from their very births. My inability to protect my children caused me far greater anguish than any pain that my husband inflicted on me. We ran away and hid many times, but he always found us. He told me that we would all die before he would ever let us go. There was no escape from the nightmare.

When my husband impregnated our 12 year old daughter, the children and I could stand no more. I was frantic, and this atrocity, after years of unrelenting torment, drove me to make a terrible mistake. I offer no excuses for that mistake, and I live with the guilt every day. I do believe, however, that I have paid for it, not only with 24 years in prison, but with blood broken bones, and the pain and fear that never leave me. What my children suffered and still endure is far beyond evaluation.

I am not a threat to society, nor am I seeking an easy end to my years in prison. For women like me there will never be an easy end. To this very day, I always know when it is 4:00 p.m. I don't have to look at my watch because the stabbing pain in my stomach tells me the time. The scars on my body and the grief in my heart will be with me until I die.

FOR EIGHTEEN YEARS, I have been eligible for parole, but the Board of Prison Terms refuses to take my circumstances into consideration and release me. I present no risk to the community: it is only the nature of my crime that prevents my release. Domestic Violence and Battered Woman Syndrome were not recognized or understood when this case was tried, so the Board of Prison Terms will not consider it now.

FORTY YEARS, is long enough to suffer, and you can help to end this awful injustice. Act now. Tell the Board of Prison Terms, and/or your elected representatives in the California Legislature that you support parole and/or clemency for all battered woman incarcerated in California today.

THE WOMAN WHO HAS ENDURED THIS NIGHTMARE FOR FORTY YEARS COULD BE YOUR SISTER, YOUR MOTHER, YOUR DAUGHTER!!

By Anonymous

**Taken from *Free Battered Women:*
www.freebatteredwomen.org**

911 and the case of the LA-8

The next time you hear Attorney General Ashcroft dismiss complaints about civil liberties abuses under the USA Patriot Act as "built on misrepresentation, supported by unfounded fear [and] held aloft by hysteria," consider the plight of Khader Hamide and Michel Shehadeh. Born in the West Bank, both men came to the United States in their college years and have now lived here thirty two and twenty-four years, respectively. They are lawful permanent residents and hard-working fathers - Hamide supplies luxury coffee shops; Shehadeh runs an Italian restaurant. They have never been charged with even the most minor criminal offense. Yet in September they learned that the government will seek their deportation under the Patriot Act for distributing Palestinian magazines and raising humanitarian aid in Los Angeles more than twenty years ago.

Such activity was legal at that time, and it is plainly protected by the First Amendment. Yet the Bush Administration claims that the Patriot Act authorizes the government to deport the two men.

To be sure, Hamide and Shehadeh's troubles did not begin with the Patriot Act, or even with this Administration. Immigration authorities arrested them sixteen years ago with five other young Palestinians and a Kenyan woman - dubbed the "LA 8" by the media - on charges of being affiliated with the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, then the second-largest faction of the Palestine Liberation Organization. The government claimed that the PFLP advocated world communism, making affiliation with it a deportable offense under the McCarran-Walter Act. At the time FBI Director William Webster testified before Congress that none of the eight had engaged in any criminal activity, and that had they been US citizens there would have been no basis for their arrest.

In 1989, in a case litigated with the Center for Constitutional Rights, the National Lawyers Guild and the ACLU, a federal judge declared the McCarran-Walter Act charges unconstitutional. The following year Congress repealed that McCarthy-era law. The government nonetheless pursued deportation under new charges. The federal courts next barred the deportations on the grounds that the government, in violation of the First

Amendment, had selectively targeted the group for constitutionally protected political activities. In

1996, however, Congress stripped federal courts of authority to hear selective-enforcement challenges to deportation, and in 1999 the Supreme Court ruled that the cases could go forward.

The Administration's Patriot Act charges render foreign nationals deportable for providing "material support" to any group of two or more that has threatened to use or has used a weapon with intent to endanger person or property. The government need not show that the support has any connection to terrorist activity. In the Orwellian land of the Patriot Act, distributing magazines becomes "material support." And it gets worse. At the same time, the Administration also announced that it would seek Hamide and Shehadeh's deportation under the original McCarran-Walter Act charges. The statute still technically applies, because its repeal did not affect pending cases.



But what interest does the government have in enforcing a statute that punishes speech and association, was declared unconstitutional fourteen years ago and was repealed by Congress thirteen years ago?

It's all in the name of the "war on terrorism," the government will say. But the LA 8 case, seen in Arab-American communities as the prime example of US hostility toward Arab immigrants, has probably done more to undermine

that effort than any case in the past twenty years. Immigrants from all over the world have come here, distributed magazines discussing the conflicts back home and sent charitable donations there as well. But the only immigrants in deportation proceedings for doing so for at least a quarter-century have been pro-Palestinian activists.

The vendetta against the LA 8 was a critical reason for the Arab community's deep distrust of the government even before 9/11. The cost of that distrust became clear in the aftermath of the attacks, as the government, evidently with no idea where the terrorist threats might lie, rounded up several thousand Arab and Muslim foreign nationals who had nothing to do with terrorism - further alienating those communities. The latest chapter in the LA 8 case, courtesy of the Patriot Act, will do nothing to make us more secure - and much to make us less free.

A STRUGGLE ON TWO FRONTS: PRISONS & IMPERIALIST WAR

After a war waged by the U.S. military against Vietnam which took the lives of more than 3 million Vietnamese people and more than 58,000 GIs, the U.S. finally withdrew in 1975. It had suffered its first official major military defeat by a united peoples struggle led by the Vietnamese, along with a mass U.S. anti-war movement.

Four years earlier, another heroic struggle of resistance had taken place inside the U.S. The battlefield was in upstate New York at the notorious Attica prison. Hundreds of prisoners—African American, Latino, Native and white—organized a united front and took over the prison for four days in September 1971.

These prisoners exposed to a largely uninformed U.S. population and to the world that U.S. dungeons were nothing more than concentration camps for the poor. The demands they made of the prison officials and the ruling-class governor, Nelson Rockefeller, reflected both the daily inhumane treatment that exists for prisoners along with concerns for the worldwide problems caused by racism, capitalist greed and imperialist war.

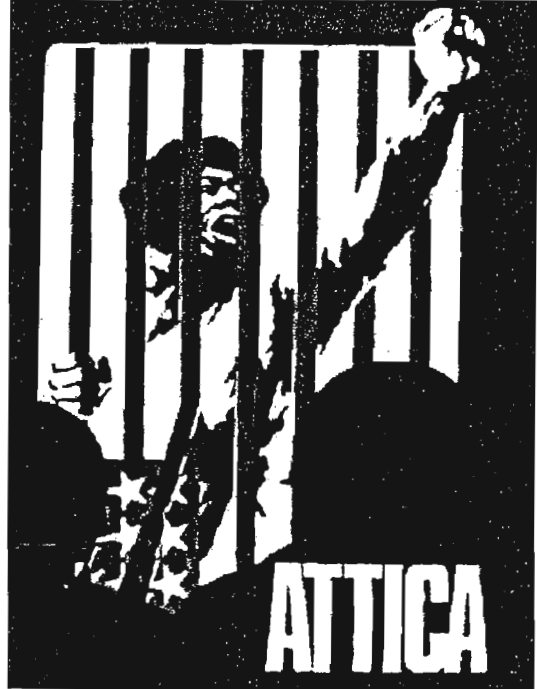
Among the prisoners' demands was the right to be unionized to win a decent wage with benefits like other workers. Another demand was for willing prisoners to be granted political asylum in socialist Cuba.

The political consciousness of these prisoners was inspired by the writings of anti-imperialist Vietnamese leader Ho Chi Minh as well as other revolutionary figures like Che Guevara, Karl Marx and George Jackson.

This rebellion was drowned in blood as Rockefeller ordered the National Guard to open fire, resulting in a slaughter that left 29 prisoners and 10 hostages dead. What this uprising showed was that economic and political repression gives birth to social consciousness, solidarity and class struggle.

U.S. TERRORISM AT HOME AND ABROAD

Fast forward to what is happening now. The names may have changed but the struggle is the same. This time the U.S. military has carried out another brutal war against Iraq and is bogged down in a racist occupation of that once sovereign country. Like the Vietnamese, the Iraqi people are putting up a heroic resistance. This occupation is part and parcel of Bush's so-called war on terror.



The economic and political repression inside the prisons has deepened over the past 30 years.

During the era of Attica, there were an estimated 300,000 prisoners in the U.S. Today U.S. prisons and jails are now filled with over 2.1 million poor and working people, more than any other industrialized country.

Women prisoners, many of them single mothers, constitute the fastest-growing prison population. It has been documented that at least 70 percent of imprisoned women and men were convicted of non-violent, drug-related "crimes." Many suffer from HIV/AIDS, other disabilities and illiteracy. Amnesty International and other groups have accused the U.S. prison system of violating many international laws, especially the racist, anti-poor application of the death penalty.

The building of private prisons, including juvenile detention centers, has been one of the most profitable markets for Wall Street investors. Prison slave labor has enriched the coffers of U.S. corporations to the tune of over \$1 billion annually. This super-exploitation lowers the wages of many workers and undermines the campaign to organize the unorganized. Unions should make it a policy to organize prisoners as they are doing with immigrants and other low-paid workers.

One of the main reasons such blatant exploitation and oppression exists inside the prisons is institutionalized racism that permeates throughout the entire criminal justice system. According to Mother Jones.com, in 2000 some 66 percent of those incarcerated were people of color. This is hugely disproportionate to their numbers in the population. There were more Black men in prison in 2001 than in college. (Justice Policy Institute)

People of color, especially youth, are demonized and criminalized in the media to help drive an invisible wedge between the multi-national and multi-cultural communities, who have common interests.

This same divide-and-conquer tactic is a cornerstone of U.S. foreign policy as leaders like Saddam Hussein, Robert Mugabe and Fidel Castro are portrayed as "tyrants" and "dictators" by the mainstream media and U.S. government to justify imperialist aggression.

REPRESSION & POLITICAL PRISONERS

The U.S. government likes to ostracize other countries for having political prisoners—especially those countries that favor a different economic system such as Cuba, North Korea and China.

The truth is that there are U.S. prisoners who have been victims of illegal frame-ups because they have a history of being outspoken opponents against racism, imperialism and colonialism. The more well-known political prisoners include Mumia Abu-Jamal, Leonard Peltier, Jamil Abdullah Al-Amin (formerly H. Rap Brown), the Cuban 5, the Angola 3, the Puerto Rican independentistas, members of the MOVE 9 and many more.

The repressive U.S. Patriot Act since 9/11 has sanctioned the illegal detentions and torture of thousands of unidentified South Asian, Middle Eastern and Muslim immigrants within these borders and on a U.S. military base in Guantanamo, Cuba.

Palestinian detainees such as Professor Sami Al-Arian, Amer Jubran and the Los Angeles 8 are being threatened with prison and/or deportation for defending Palestinian resistance against Israeli occupation.

The movement for social change has important political allies locked away who must never be forgotten in the heat of battle. While fighting French colonialism, Ho Chi Minh wrote from his prison cell, "People who come out of prison can build up the country...Those who protest at injustice are people of true merit...When the prison doors are opened, the real dragon will fly out."

Editor's note: This article was reprinted from the Oct. 30, 2003 issue of Workers World newspaper. We do not endorse the authoritarian politics of the Worker's World Party. The WWP has a history of defending fascist and Stalinist dictators, including China's Deng Xiaoping, and North Korea's Kim Jong Il, and others. They subscribe to the belief that "the enemy of my enemy is my friend," which leads them to align themselves with tyrants simply because they may be anti-American or "communist." They are also notorious for controlling the progressive coalitions they join, which comes naturally to them because they are a hierarchical Leninist formation. However, this is a rather excellent article linking the struggles against the prison industrial complex to the struggles against war and imperialism, and it is worth printing for that reason alone. Take from this article what is useful, and discard what is not.

Support needed for Eddie Hatcher, American Indian Political Prisoner

Dear friends,

Longtime American Indian social justice activist and political prisoner, Eddie Hatcher recently wrote to us at Break the Chains informing us that he's having serious problems maintaining his website and keeping his support going. He has asked us to circulate the following request in hopes that more people will step forward to help him out.

In a letter dated September 25, he writes:

"....If you can send this around for me, I'd appreciate it:

1. Payment for website is \$25 monthly (I think or \$30).
2. Need a webmaster or funds to pay the current webmaster a little each month.
3. I have one person doing the typing for the website but could use one more. They type the articles up or emails and email them to the webmaster.
4. Need a contact person I can stay in contact with to help coordinate all of this.

Always,
Eddie"

If anyone can help with any of this, please contact the support committee immediately at: **Justice For Eddie Hatcher** PO Box 381627, Cambridge, MA, 02238-1627

For more info on Eddie Hatcher please visit his website: <http://www.eddiehatcher.org>

Write to Eddie: **Eddie Hatcher** #0173499, PO Box 215, Maury, North Carolina 28554



Government and the Prison System:

By anarchist/anti-fascist political prisoner Matthew Lamont

Most people who write about prison abolition describe prison as being cruel, inhumane, and racist. It is all of that and more, but many don't look at its uselessness. Many more don't look at how prison is almost a crystal ball to tell what future the government holds for society. In this article I will talk about how a method of reforming a criminal has become exactly the opposite: a method of creating worse criminals. I will also cover what the cause of crime really is, why the government needs prisons to stay in power, and why we don't need either.

The Origins of the Prison Concept

If I told most prisoners where the idea of prisons came from, they would probably refer me to a California medical facility. The idea of prisons came from the American Quakers in Philadelphia in 1787. The Quakers opposed floggings, public humiliation, and public executions. Instead, they advocated putting a criminal in solitary confinement with nothing but a bible. The idea was the criminal would have nothing to do, but to reflect on his or her wrongs, and come out a good productive individual. The idea also stressed that criminals be kept separate, so they would not influence each other. As time progressed prisons became a preferred method of punishment around the world and as prisons filled and industry came along it became too expensive to keep inmates from congregating, and later, communicating. As centuries have progressed the goals of imprisonment have become blurred and contradictory.

Goals

What is the goal of imprisoning a person? The three most common answers are to reform the criminal, deter crime, and protect society. However, does the prison system accomplish any of these goals? Decide for yourself.

As we already covered earlier, the Quakers made prison an alternative to other punishments they found inhumane. They believed in reforming the criminal, instead of taking vengeance on him or her. Of course, the only similarities today to the original concept of prison the Quakers had and the modern-day prison industry is that the walls are still made of concrete. The idea that a prisoner sitting in a cell with a bible as his or hers only company would reform a criminal, seemed ridiculous to many people back then. Prisons were a hard idea to sell, but eventually prevailed after much lobbying. The current ideology and practice the prison system carries today would never be supported by the Quakers, nor would it have been adopted by the already skeptical state governors and congressman. If you were on the streets in poverty with no employment, and had to steal to survive, what good would two years of being housed in a violent crime-infested environment, with only criminals as your company, do? Undoubtedly, it would only make matters worse. With a felony record employers are hesitant to give a person a job. Desensitized by prison and unemployed, most parolees and ex-cons become even more dedicated to a life of crime, and for a few, a life of violence.

Deterrence is a joke at best. It is strange indeed that the states with the strictest laws have the highest crime

rate. California came up with the "three strikes" law. The law was campaigned under removing repeat violent offenders from society, using a brutal child-rape and murder as their example. No decent and honest human being would want people roaming the street preying on children. The law quickly passed. The results - Our favorite boogymen are still preying on children, undeterred by the "justice system." Meanwhile, the law is being arbitrarily used on petty offenses, such as a man getting 25 years-to-life for stealing a piece of pizza. Our children are still in danger, but at least we have removed the threat to our pizza. As the laws have become more strict more low-income families have been devastated, resulting in an abundance of orphans and single mothers, and a new generation of children grown up on the streets. Now with 32 prisons overfilled in California alone, our "war on crime" continues on.

The prison system cannot protect society from crime. For every criminal taken off the street another ten quickly appear. In fact, the prison system endangers society. As shall be discussed in the next section, prisons are breeding grounds for crime and violence. There are few who leave prison unaffected by the experience of being snatched out of society and being thrown into an even more violent and oppressive world. Though prisons have "job opportunities" (sweat shops) inside, most of these are manual labor in which you don't learn any valuable job skills. Instead, an inmate learns new crimes, joins a gang, or becomes extremely angry, bitter, and frustrated. How can an institution protect society when the only career inmates learn is a criminal one, before being unleashed back in society?

The Belly of the Beast

Imagine living in the middle of the desert, 200 miles away from home and being kept in by electrified fences with gun towers on each corner. Now imagine waking up everyday to a small locked concrete cell. Identical cells line the walls of a large gym-type room housing around 100 people. These hundred people make up multiple opposing factions who always have a shaky truce. Many inmates walk around with improvised weapons shoved up their ass (this is called "packing your lunchbox). On the yard inmates train with their separate gangs, doing numerable calisthenics, pushups, pull-ups, and lifting weights. The yard is as unstable as nitroglycerin; a mere spark can turn the yard into a bloody battlefield of chaos. The guards have long lost control of the prisoners. They just make sure nobody escapes, they don't get attacked, and the chaos is contained. Fanning the flames is the flowing drug trade and racial tension. Welcome to the modern-day "maximum security" California state prison. For many convicts, the scene above doesn't need an imagination, because it's their everyday life. Prisoners and guards call these types of institutions "gladiator schools" or "war-zones." The most infamous of these "war-zones" have become household names. Whether or not you have ever seen a county jail before, the names Pelican Bay, San Quentin, or Soledad probably ring a bell. These prisons used to pump out over a hundred stabbings annually by themselves. They were the most active prisons in California as far as race riots and gang rivalry. To change this, the worse prisons turned a few of the level 4 yards into level 2s or 1s. This way the

A Mirror Image of Uselessness

murder and mayhem is now equally spread throughout the CDC (California Department of Corrections). This is a typical solution prison officials apply to most problems found in the prison system. Change the problem, shuffle it, sugarcoat it, cover it up, but never solve it.

Prisons have become a society within a society; there own gangs, rules, laws, politics, courts, and even their own prisons inside prisons (security housing units, or SHU). There's jobs and unemployment (which is ironically on the rise). There are territorial boundaries of micro-nations created by inmates. There are alliances, treaties, truces, and wars. There are revolutionaries and fascists. And of course, there's crime.

With buildings holding 100 people in a human warehouse, things can understandably get messy. With five of those buildings on one yard, things are totally out of control. It may come as a surprise to some people that these institutions, where security is the top priority and deterrence second, have more crime going on inside, than the areas with the highest crime rate in the state have going on outside. Buying drugs is much easier in prison than it is on the street, though much more expensive. Drug use and alcohol abuse is much more common in prison than any neighborhood on the street. Even the guards are in on the drug trade. Of course, drugs are the least of the Dept. of Corrections problems. There's prostitution, extortion, bribery, assaults, stabbings, murders, and in some places, rape. Not to mention the all-too-often rioting that seems to plague the prison system. Unfortunately, none of these crimes are usually implemented towards the staff. Most riots are clashes between competing ethnicities, or gangs. The few cases of stabbings or assaults on guards usually are a result of a guard antagonizing or attacking an inmate. In these cases the inmate's comrades are sometimes bound by their gang's code of conduct to "jump in" the fight. A guard being stabbed is extremely rare. It is mostly reserved for guards who make it their goal in life to treat inmates as abusively as possible. The amount of these types of guards, though still high, has dropped since more inmates have gang affiliations now these days and the use of steel weaponry has become a preferred method of settling disputes. With the exception of the Black Guerrilla Family, inmate gangs do not organize themselves with the specific intent to target correctional officers. The prison gang Black Guerrilla Family, who carried on the legacy of the infamous prison revolutionary George Jackson, has been drive underground and is almost completely inactive. Most members have been given "indeterminate SHU" terms, which means spending the rest of your time in the hole. For lifers, that's their entire life. This was due to DOC outlawing membership in any "prison gang" (a gang started in prison). If three separate pieces of evidence conclude you are a member, you are considered "validated," and sent to the SHU until you give up information ("debrief") about your gang to prove you have dropped out. The names of George Jackson and the Black Guerrilla Family are only whispered about, like forbidden legends.

With all this in mind I'm sure you're wondering what similarities our current prison system has to its original concept. The more pressing question seems to me: If the prison system cannot deter crime in its own

facilities, how is it going to serve as a deterrent to would-be criminals on the street? Or how about: how can this type of environment ever hope to benefit an individual? Your guess is as good as mine.

Is There Any Suggestions?

I would challenge anybody to show how prison benefits society and justifies the amount of tax payer's money that is set aside for the parasitical CDC; A Department that has only proved to develop violent criminal mentalities in those who were thrown in prison for trying to climb out of poverty through illegal methods. Even the courts have recognized the chaos going on into today's prison facilities, as seen in this statement: "The association between men in correction institutions is closer and more fraught with physical danger and psychological pressures than is almost any kind of association between human beings." Is it hard to believe that an individual who has lived five years in a man-made hell like prison would come out more nihilistic towards the lives of people in the society that put him in there?

Many prison activists have tried and in some cases succeeded in improving the conditions of prison. However, this has failed to accomplish any more than easing the suffering caused by the disease of imprisonment. No matter how much you alleviate the symptoms, the disease remains only to cause new problems. Like a disease, the prison system gets worse as time progresses. The CDC is always on the verge of collapse. With 32 prisons overfilled, and no money to build new ones, the CDC's facilities are in chaos. Across the state, prisoners are being laid off jobs and their college courses are being cut. Recently the prison staff in Wasco State Prison and Delano went on Strike. This was particularly damaging to the CDC, because both prisons have the reception centers that CDC uses to process incoming inmates to the system. We are now seeing "tough on crime" politicians suddenly flipping the script, though as quietly as possible: Law-makers silently passed sentence reduction laws on all short-term inmates housed in community correctional facilities and "fire camps." However, no matter how many short-term "solutions" CDC tries, the holes are only patched up temporarily, while more seem to appear. Still, the CDC carries on its damaged voyage through the stormy waters and the prison officials, armed with tin cups, try to keep their condemned ship from sinking into the chaos below.

So where are the lifeboats? It is important to understand what the root of the problem is, before we can determine a solution. The politicians will tell you the problem is crime, but what is the cause of most crimes? The most common myth that we are taught to believe is that the individual who committed a crime did it because they were evil or acting on evil temptations. This is ridiculous and entirely illogical. In fact, the idea probably belongs more in a bedtime story told to scare children, than in any campaign speech or law book. The insulting fact is that prison officials and "law and order" politicians try to use this myth in order to scare the public into accepting tougher laws and more prisons. The sad fact is the public actually buys it. Prisons have

become the night light of society to keep "evil" criminals from coming out from under the bed.

However, as much as the boogeyman theory is accepted by the public, the facts remain un-mistakenly clear. Prison officials have stated that only 10-to-15 percent of inmates in the prison population are considered "violent predatory offenders" who need to be under continuous physical supervision. This leaves 85-to-90% of inmates who are either considered non-violent offenders or inmates who have not demonstrated a repetitive pattern of violence. A vast majority of these inmate's crimes are products of a life of poverty and desperation. The favorite boogeymen that politicians use to pass their laws, such as child molesters, serial killers, and rapists, are an extremely small percentage of the prison population. In fact, it is a national policy to put these types of offenders in "protective custody", because the general population inmates will try to kill them every time they are discovered on the mainline.

If you were to interview inmates you would be surprised to hear each one has a similar story to tell. A life on the street; broken homes; mother worked two jobs; father was in prison; raised by a street gang... the stories go on. Many spent their youths uneducated, unemployed, and unsupervised. I was told by one inmate of a nine year boy who jumped at him from an alleyway with a handgun, where he was patrolling for rival gang members. He ended up taking the boy home and feeding him. When asked where his mother was, the boy didn't have a clue. Because of the vast amount of fathers and the growing number of mothers in low income neighborhoods are being thrown in prison, this kind of situation is becoming more common. As the prison system increases in size, the chaos on the streets seems to get worse, instead of better. Some areas seem more like a seen out of the civil war in Beirut, than an American city. With armed children, assault rifles, and rival gangs doing guerilla style attacks on each other, it makes you wonder what exactly this so-called "war on crime" has accomplished. Some rivalries actually start in prison and spill over onto the streets outside. Prison has become so much a-part-of life "in the ghetto," that wearing clothing that resembles state-issued prison uniforms is a common trend in the hip-hop culture. As unemployment continues to rise, the economy continues to collapse, the school funding continues to be cut, and the rich collect their fortune from tax cuts, the career of criminal activity seems more and more promising to the poor youth of today. Fortunes are to be made off dope house franchises, and gangs continue to war over control of the best spots. Cutthroat capitalism is the popular ideology of the new generation.

What does all this mean? It means the root cause of crime is poverty. In order to drop the amount of crime perpetrated in society today it will have to be necessary to equalize the distribution of wealth. The American economic system has never worked in a way in which every individual of every race has had an equal opportunity at having a piece of the pie. It's not just that the capitalist ideals that America was founded on that is the problem, but the racism mixed with it. You can see this in the disproportioned amount of people of color in prison, as compared to whites, who represent the majority of the nation, but a very small minority in most prisons. In fact, a closer look at our prison system can

show any person what is wrong with our current society. What is more horrifying is that goals and methods of the prison system are slowly implemented into the outside world. The priorities politicians today are security deterrence, which is exactly the policy of DOC. In order to implement a society in which wealth is distributed equally, the old society must be completely eradicated, and with it the state. Racism, classism, crime, poverty, corruption, constant war, environmental disaster; the amount of problems perpetuated by the current system are too numerous to list here. It is safe to say that our current system is a failure. Today it would be hard to look at prison without looking at the entire capitalist system. It would be hard to look at capitalism without looking at the rest of the failed systems based on state control. Prisons are the logical conclusion of failed authoritarian systems. Whether "socialist," "communist," or capitalist, governments have done nothing to benefit anything, but a small elite class of people. Knowing that they cannot have masses of poor or unemployed people on the streets without facing a revolt, these governments have chosen to warehouse people like last year's Christmas ornaments. Maybe prisons have a use after all: to ensure the oppressor stays in power and the oppressed stay divided and conquered.

Write to:

Matthew Lamont
T90251
CSP/C6-166
PO Box 901
Imperial, CA
92251



MUSIC THROUGH BARS

MUSIC THROUGH BARS is currently compiling a prisoner support guide to music resources in US prisons. We are asking prisoners to write and inform us about their access to music. Can you possess recorded music personally? Can you have a personal radio? What are the rules regarding these items? If you must buy them, how much do they cost? Can they be donated, and if so, how? Is there a music program of any kind in your facility? What is it like? How accessible is it? Does it have musical instruments or sound equipment? Does it [or could it] have a music library/listening center? Can outside bands play your institution? What are the rules for approval and scheduling? Who is the contact person, and how can they be reached?

MUSIC THROUGH BARS strives to provide greater access to music to those being held captive by the state. By contributing accurate and detailed information regarding your prison's music related rules, you will be helping to create a resource guide that can be utilized by prisoner support advocates nationally.

This resource guide could be used to:

- * Help provide recorded music, instruments, or equipment to those who can receive it.
- * Assist bands in booking shows within prisons.
- * Help prisoners connect with friends and family via music and radio requests.
- * Raise awareness of the need for music in prisoners' lives...and to spark other music-oriented support projects in the future.

Please write with any contributions, questions, or concerns to:

MUSIC THROUGH BARS
PO Box 661,
Eugene, OR 97440

ELF PRESS OFFICE STATEMENT ON JOSH CONNOLE'S ARREST & RELEASE

On September 12th Josh Connole, a known environmentalist and peace activist, was arrested by the FBI. Josh was accused by the FBI of involvement with the ELF-claimed fire and vandalism of SUV dealerships in West Covina, California on August 22nd, which resulted in over a million dollars in damages.

On September 15th, Connole was released without charges due to a lack of evidence to make the case against him. It is obvious that the FBI seriously blundered in this case, rushing to make an arrest in the middle of the night based on no physical evidence at all.

Even during the lead-up to Josh's release, no concrete evidence was put forward by the FBI to suggest that Josh Connole was in any way involved with the West Covina Hummer dealership action. They apparently based the raid on a likeness comparison from blurry security-video footage and nothing else. While there is no physical evidence to suggest that Josh was at the site, there is plenty of evidence that Josh was assisting a friend moving into their house on the night the Hummer action took place, and wasn't anywhere near West Covina.

The arrest is part of a pattern of harassment the FBI has been visiting on activists in Southern California since mid-August in a desperate attempt to claim "success" in their hunt for ELF members. Since 1997, very few ELF activists have been arrested which has led to a growing frustration in the FBI as evidenced by the recent raids against activists in the San Diego area and now this arrest on what appears to be non-existent grounds.

The Earth Liberation Front Press Office would like to send a message of solidarity and support to those activists undergoing harassment by the FBI in Southern California and elsewhere. We encourage people who wish to support Earth Liberation prisoners to contribute to the Earth Liberation Prisoners Support Network which can be reached at <http://www.spiritoffreedom.org.uk>

Statement of Solidarity with Cascadia Forest Defenders

**by Peter Urban, Irish Republican Socialist
Committees of North America (IRSCNA)**

Comrades of the Cascadia Forest Defenders:

We in the Irish Republican Socialist Committees of North America, on behalf of the Irish Republican Socialist Party whom we represent in Canada and the United States, want to extend our solidarity to you and applaud you having won an injunction against further logging until at least the 2nd of September. While this is at present only a delay and not a cessation, we recognize that confronting the forces of industry with the present Administration – brazen and squalid as they are in their groveling and pandering to the interests of the capitalist rich with total disregard for the needs, interests, and wants of working people in this country and abroad – one savors every small victory. To do so, helps provide the strength necessary to see these long battles through until our final victory.

We in the Irish Republican Socialist Movement recognize that it is essential that clean air and water, bio-diversity, old growth forests, endangered species, wild rivers, and at least some retained stretches of nature in her undisturbed and pristine state must be defended and protected for human life to continue on this planet. We recognize as well, that the system of capitalism, driven solely by the pursuit of profit threatens to put our species and all others at risk. For that reason, we salute you for your courage and determination in carrying forward a campaign of eco-defense.

IRSCNA
2057 15th St., Suite B,
San Francisco, CA 94114

Earth Liberation Prisoners Support Network

* **Earth Liberation Prisoners Support Network-England**

BM Box 2407, London, WC1N 3XX, England.

Email: animalearthliberation@bigfoot.com

* **ELPSN-England**

c/o CRC, 16 Sholebroke Avenue, Chapelton, Leeds, LS7 3HB, England.

Email: earthlibprisoner@mail.com

* **ELPSN-Poland**

PO Box 43, 15-662 Bialystok 26, Poland.

* **ELSPN-North American**

New group/same email: naelpsn@graffiti.net

* **ELPSN-Turkey**

Email: elp_tr@hotmail.com



FIGHT THE COWARDLY AMERIKAN AGGRESSOR

Sound
advice,
then
and
now.



U\$ OUT
OF IRAQ

*Break the Chains, PO Box 12122, Eugene, OR 97440 USA.
www.breakthechains.net / breakthechains02@yahoo.com*