

A Revolutionary's Perspective on Nancy Kurshan's Book Out of Control

by Kijana Tashiri Askari

Despite what those who rule this society would have us believe, all human activity is collective—a combination of the work and inspiration shaped by those who came before us and those who labor with us.

--Nancy Kurshan

Every aspiring prison rights activist, both captive and non-captive, who has a desire to qualitatively learn and to develop themselves into a trained and professional activist, so as to be effective through the course of their line of work, must read and study Nancy Kurshan's book *Out of Control*. I highly suggest that study groups be formed, so as to advance and build upon the organizational framework that she has provided for the people, which has been conceptualized in simple and easy to read language. The book illustrates countless examples of mutual aid and cooperation, along with emphasizing the importance of having clearly established goals and objectives that can be reasonably achieved.

Nancy Kurshan does an excellent job of highlighting the significance of a 15 year (e.g. "1985-2000") struggle, that was waged and became manifest in their collective efforts to end the lockdown at Marion federal prison in Illinois, which morphed into one of Amerikkka's notorious control-units and isolation-based torture chamber (i.e. "solidarity confinement"). As with any struggle that is geared towards movement building, it begins with the idea of an individual and/or individuals, which was the case with the "Committee to End the Marion Lockdown" (CEML), when its founding members Nancy Kurshan, Jan Susler, and Steve Whitman initially wanted to just educate people by exposing to the public the systemic practices of social, political, economic and racial injustices that are inherent in the prison industrial slave complex (PISC) and, in addition, how these impact and affect our communities. It wasn't long, before their work took on a life all of its own molded by their relentless strategic planning and organizing.

Unbeknownst to many in society, solitary confinement units were modeled after the diabolical techniques of the mad scientist Dr. Edgar Schein of MIT. He provided a blueprint on how to break and brainwash the Chinese prisoners of war, in his book *Coercive Persuasion*. Nancy Kurshan excerpts a passage from this book on page 12:

"In order to produce marked changes of attitude and/or behavior, it is necessary to weaken, undermine or remove the supports of the old attitudes. Because most of these supports are the face to face confirmation of present behavior and attitudes, which are provided by those with whom close emotional ties exist, it is often necessary to break these emotional ties. This can be done either by removing the individual physically and preventing any communication with those whom he cares about, or by proving to him that those whom he respects are not worthy of it, and, indeed, should be actively mistrusted..."

This is relevant to the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation's (CDCR) gang validation policies and practices, in particular, to CDCR's newly created "how to make a slave" step-down program (SDP), where we prisoners have been targeted and persecuted with the same purpose and objective in mind—to break and brainwash us!!

Instrumental in the CEML'S successful grass-root organizing, were several key factors. 1) a multi-faceted approach to how they accomplished various tasks. They made a point of not just involving themselves in activities—if they could avoid it. This allowed them to preserve and maximize their limited resources. For example, they would lay out plans 3, 6, or 12 months in advance, containing specific goals and objectives, that they wanted to achieve. This provided their personnel with organizational structure (e.g. "leadership"), which armed them with the tools to modify their tactics, when circumstances warranted such.

This point is significant, as many activists find themselves becoming overwhelmed, burnt-out and worn-down, as they are often operating upon their emotional subjectivity that is associated with being outraged over how the people that they're attempting to aid and assist are being oppressed by a racist and diabolical system of government!! This typically clouds an activist's ability to critically assess the fact that victories often won't be achieved overnight—especially without any organizational structure in place, to compartmentalize their work.

2) Their collaborative work with political prisoners like: Sundiata Acoli, Oscar Lopez Rivera, Alejandrina Torres, Bill Dunne, Safiya Bukhari, Hanif-Bey, Carlos A. Torres, Silvia Baraldini, Susan Rosenberg, etc., which later included prisoners that were subjected to various human rights abuses. The relationships that were forged enabled human bridges to be constructed. CEML members were able to learn hands on, of the contradictions that plagued this slave kamp (e.g. "Marion Prison") and others like it. This allowed CEML to be equipped with the necessary tools to achieve their objectives while providing substantive support to prisoners. Pivotal was CEML's functional application of democracy, through staying in contact with the prisoners, but more importantly, including the prisoners in the decision making process, when strategizing for a particular action and/or a community event. This protected prisoners from being kept nameless, faceless and voiceless, when the issues directly pertained to them being brutalized, tormented and dehumanized in every extreme by our oppressors!!

3) CEML understood the importance of having organizational infrastructure, wherein they constantly distributed pamphlets, leaflets, flyers, brochures and other propaganda based materials, via workshops, seminars and study groups they held to educate people about their work. This set forth clearly defined organizational expectations, which made it easier for CEML to receive support from the community via people wanting to become CEML members and volunteering their time, or donating funds and other essential resources for their work.

4) CEML did not limit their objective to just ending the lockdown at Marion. They also instituted additional campaigns, that became interconnected (e.g. "secondary") to their pursuits. For example, the prisoners at Marion were being forced to drink, shower and wash themselves in toxic-polluted water!! The exposure of this, brought outrage from the environmentalists in our

communities. This allowed CEML to forge a united front with them. And this was a pivotal tactic, when you account for the fact that CEML only had 10 to 15 core members throughout their entire 15 years struggle!! This is extremely impressive!!

And so I close with a clenched fist salute to Nancy Kurshan and the entire CEML staff for a job well done, but importantly—for having the where with all, to share their struggle and life experiences with the people. So again, I urge the people to read and study Nancy Kurshan's book *Out of Control*, and build upon the framework that she provided us. The book is available online at: www.freedomarchives.org

Build to win!!

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