

!ROCK!

★ Working to Extend Democracy to All ★

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STRIKE IT UP

AROUSING THOUGHT WHILE BUILDING PUBLIC OPINION

“Without preparedness superiority is not real superiority and there can be no initiative either. Having grasped this point, a force which is inferior but prepared can often defeat a superior enemy by surprise attack” (1)

By Jose H. Villarreal, Pelican Bay Prison

Introduction

It has been said that writing is an art form. It can in certain instances be seen as an art, but when it comes to power struggles writing becomes necessary for survival. The prison writer to be specific is confined on many levels, where the prisoners is most free is in the theoretical realm. Because prison struggles for human rights is a protracted struggle, this means the prisoner needs to use everything accessible, including the pen and paper.

Prison literature which is created by the captive from our perspective is a weapon because it can be empowering and liberating. When prisoners create articles, theory or critiques it not just teaches other prison-

ers and sparks deeper analysis within the prison masses, but it also shines a light on these concentration camps and helps to raise the awareness of these camps. In this sense prison lit. educates both sides of the prison walls and draws more into the struggle for prisoner’s rights and human rights more generally.

It is critical that Lumpen understand what their political position is in this society. How can one change a situation without understanding it in the first place? The fact that the U.S. has millions imprisoned can’t be understood fully without knowing what creates these conditions that necessitate so many to be entombed. The fact that “crimes” were broken is not what this mass imprisonment is about, as I will get into in this writing, it goes far deeper than this.

Discovering our power will not just be realized through the physical realm with future strikes and prisoners’ worker’s unions, but it will also surface through our literature. Once harnessed prison writers and theoreticians will be one of our biggest weapons in our quest for rights. Ending torture and solitary confinement will be one step in our march toward liberation on a grander scale. Our writers will play a role in this reality to finally spring forth. All great movements and revolutions have always had writers at the helm in the process and the prison movement for human rights will be no different.

There are many different approaches for striking up an assessment or theory of our social reality. Some may tie history into our current situation, others may raise rhetorical questions or create theory of our situation.

All of these efforts are important and add to a growing collection of contemporary prison thought. This is important because thought leads to practice. No people or nation was ever liberated without thought and practice. They feed off of each other and propel a people forward through a painful process of learning from ones mistakes, of learning from history or to put it politically, through historical materialism. Writers do, and always have helped contribute to this process.

When Words Sprout from Concrete and Oppression

Writers in general are the translators of truth, the bearers of truth. The writer at once perceives the world in which they exist, captures it and delivers this reality to the people. At times the writer wraps this reality in flowery language, adds humor to the message or nudges the reader along in nuance. Either way the writer becomes the conveyor of truth, whether it be a good or bad truth. The writer thus enshrines a phenomenon on to the printed page for the writer’s peers to grapple with as well as future generations to learn from.

For the prison writer it is much more of a consuming process because of the dire situation and realities that prison writers must contend with. Our literature is birthed through a canal of brutality and at times torture. For those in control units and especially in solitary confinement writing becomes a struggle of survival. For many their sanity dangles by a thread, and for others the struggle for justice compels one to use words as weaponized ideas which re-

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sist what is occurring in U.S. prisons.

The state does not take too kindly to the prison writer, or any writer for that matter. Those who challenge the state and help to highlight their dirty deeds are met with more repression or complete isolation. At times the prisoner will be prevented or hindered greatly from expressing oneself or tackling a phenomenon. The ability to educate the public is almost always frowned upon by the state. In Califas the state often labels prison writings as “gang activity”. This is done because the state understands the power of words.

In history, prisons around the world have always suppressed or attempted to suppress prison voices, especially those which spoke on behalf of the voiceless. The oppressed and colonized have always faced censorship from the oppressor nation, this has always been a part of the colonization process. But prisoners, and especially revolutionary prisoners are a resourceful bunch and these writers have always found ways to continue to write. Writing then is a form of resistance.

Throughout history if we look at writers we find many who have been imprisoned for one reason or another. Cervantez, Voltaire and Rousseau are but a few who have been imprisoned and who continued to write from within a cell. For the prison writer, earmarking daily struggles against oppression and forms of resistance for future writing becomes second nature, as fluid as the ink coloring the paper.

Prisoners are the fertilizer for repressive shoots. For most prisoners repression comes with all the other state issued “fish kit” right alongside your tooth brush and blankets. But some of the people’s greatest thinkers have done their best theoretical works within the most extreme forms of prison repression. The concrete cell in which they were held seemed to only enhance their ability to see their reality more clearly. Stripped of all bribes and illusion of the society in which they lived they were able to not just explain their concrete reality, but then envision a better way forward not just for prisoners, but for society as well. Their vision transcended the prison walls and scaled the fences in order to pave the theoretical way forward. In this way the prison writer is freer than many outside prison walls.

Lenin’s first major study was his first book *THE DEVELOPMENT OF CAPITALISM IN RUSSIA* which he wrote while he was in prison. Because of Lenin’s

revolutionary activity, the Czarist state sent Lenin to a Siberian prison which was a torturous experience. The intention was to break Lenin into subservience. His understanding of his social reality lead him not to give up, but to continue to struggle even from within his prison cell and continue to write which culminated in his literary work, *This work would be a contribution to the Russian people outside of prisons who were struggling to understand the political reality of Czarist Russia.* In this sense Lenin added to building awareness, to building public opinion of what was occurring in Russia. And he did this from within a prison cell.

In Calitas George Jackson wrote his book “*Soledad Brother*” from within a prison cell. This was a time when prisoners did not have half the things that we have now. Some things were better, but a lot of things were worse. Repression was more present. Even though her may have been in the hole George continued to write and agitate through the pen. His writings also led to the book “*Blood In My Eye*” which was also written in prison. The prison walls do not water down the effectiveness and power of words, one only needs to look to how most U.S prisons continue to ban the books of George Jackson to see this.

As prisoners our observations and thought may be even more powerful than if we were outside spectators, because we give an assessment of the contemporary prison experience which is live and in color. The oppression is not in the abstract because we breathe it and live it daily so it becomes clear to us and we can penetrate its essence and hear its heartbeat.

Ricardo Flores Magon was another great prison writer. He wrote consistently from his federal prison cell at Leavenworth during the early part of the 20th century. His writings can still be found on the internet for those wanting to research Aztlan during the early 20th century. His writings tackle the national oppression that Raza were going through at that time. Both of the Magon brothers were brilliant writers whether they were inside or outside of prison walls. They propagated resistance to oppression within the United States. Being in prison stopped nothing.

Many other contemporary prison writers can be found today scratching out ideas from one concentration kamp or another. Coping with the same repression or torture as the other prisoners while at the same time preserving the experience and thought

for the people. Most of these prison theoreticians can be found in the pages of publication like *Prison Focus* where theoretical resistance emerges and finds comfort. The prison writer must write as surely as one must consume water.

Being a prison writer does not come free from threat from the state. Two of the above examples were silenced by the state and never left prison alive. Both writers delivering truth from within these bowels of the enemy are not the only writers who conflict and invite lethal repression from the state apparatus. Those outside of prison are not immune to threat.

For the Chican@ nation the most glaring example of this repression lies with the assassination of Ruben Salazar, Salazar was a gifted Chicano writer whose work exposing the national oppression of Aztlan helped build public opinion. After moving from his hometown of El Paso, Texas to Northern Califas where he worked as a Journalist, he settled at the *L.A Times* Newspaper working first as a Foreign Correspondent travelling the world. This was a time when the Chican@ Movement was in full swing and this helped Salazar to become conscious.

Writing about the struggles the struggles that Chican@s were going through was what Salazar began to focus on. Despite his earlier attempt at assimilation, the reality was that assimilation was impossible. At one point Salazar even said publicly about Chican@s situation “We never will melt into that mythical melting pot”. It was at this point that Salazar began to write for the people.

Salazar saw that what the Raza were going through at that time was going on unchecked. There was no voice addressing the attacks on Aztlan and he knew that as a Chicano he needed to do this part for his people and he began to write.

Once he wrote about two Mexicans who were murdered by the pigs. The pigs were indicted, but they warned him that his writings were dangerous. They told him to “stop stirring up the Mexicans” and that “Mexicans are not ready” for his writing. Not long afterwards, during the Chicano Moratorium march against the U.S war on Vietnam on August 29, 1970 Ruben Salazar was killed by the pig, shot with a tear gas gun.

A courageous Brown voice distinguished by the state. His crime being standing up for his people and daring to struggle against the oppressor nation through sharp

words which cut deeper than he probably knew. As uncomfortable as it must have been the people always need our perspective explained. We need our press.

People's Literature

In any social Movement throughout history the momentum, at some point when facing an oppressor, there will be a need for the people's side to be told. This will mean that a people's literature will be needed and a cadre of writers will need to be unleashed. This works to educate the people who may be bystanders to the particular struggles while bringing more to understand that we stand on the side of justice. Our version of history will require our own writers.

In WHAT IS TO BE DONE Lenin describes the use of literature as a form of war. He described this method of struggling via the pen as "exposure literature" where in Russia in his day this literature sought to expose working conditions of the Proletariat and these writings were most effective. The Russian proletariat were the most revolutionary at the time in Russia. In the same vein our people's literature needs to highlight the contradiction between prisoners and the state, shine a light on the various forms of oppression that we face in U.S. prisons.

Just as the state has propaganda, the people need our propaganda arm as well. This is possible via publishing no matter what kind of concentration kamp we may find ourselves in. Our writing should be harvested from the people from the people in the method of "from the masses, to the masses". Mao explains this process as follows

"In all the practical work of our Party, all correct leadership is necessarily "from the masses, to the masses". This means: take the ideas of the masses (scattered and unsystematic ideas) and concentrate them (through study turn them into concentrated and systematic ideas), then go to the masses and propagate and explain these ideas until the masses embrace them as their own, hold fast to them and translate them into action, and test the correctness of these ideas in such action. Then once again concentrate ideas from the masses and once again go to the masses so that the ideas are preserved in and carried through. And so on, over and over again in an endless spiral, with the ideas becoming more correct, more vital and richer each time. Such is the

Marxist theory of knowledge". (2)

From the masses to the masses is the process as Mao explained of taking the ideas of the people and synthesize them in their most advanced form and take them back to the people. This method is repeated and built on so that our ideas become more advanced and closer to truth. Because our social reality, along with all phenomenon is constantly changing this process never ends. We constantly need to assess and reassess the people's thoughts and politicize the most advanced theory.

It's important that we arouse the Lumpen to wield the power of the pen. Lit is a part of culture and culture is an ideological weapon, one we need to use in the class struggle of the imprisoned Lumpen and the state. Our target audience first and foremost is prisoners. It is essential for the prison mass to understand it is oppressed and then to realize its power.

Political literature has a real role in the building of true political power. An organ in any mass movement is its scaffolding which ensures a strong theoretical training and guidance. This is important because in any struggle, at some point it needs a definite political character. The prison struggle for human rights is no different. If this is an embryonic class struggle that we are facing in prison than we cannot fall back on primitive modes of struggle, we need to ensure we meet 21st century needs, this would include a strong propaganda arm.

Social media, the creation of pamphlets, the production of solid articles and literature which deliver powerful portrayals of prison oppression and our struggles to obtain justice should be pursued with as much vigor as we can espouse.

A people's literature should expose the fallacy of the state while promoting independence of the oppressed internal nations within the U.S. as well as the imprisoned Lumpen. Such examples transform a people and ideologically unhitch the people from the oppressor. As Lenin said it:

"From the moment all members of society or even only the overwhelming majority, have learned to administer the state themselves have taken this business into their own hands, have "set up" control over the insignificant minority of capitalists, over the gentry, who wish to preserve their capitalist habits, and over the workers who have been completely demoralized by capitalism – from this moment the need for government begins to disappear"(3)

A true people's lit exposes the states errors at every turn. It also shows the people ways in which to rely on our own efforts and kicks state parameters and influence to the curb. This is when as Lenin says the need for the state becomes unnecessary in the minds of the people.

There are dual struggles in constant battle within the people. These manifest in silence and speaking out. Through passivity and activity and resistance and surrender. These struggles will ultimately determine the fate of our oppression. Paulo Freire described ones perception as an "intervention" in an oppressive reality. One that is not in the oppressor's interest. The state would rather prisoners not read of struggles or revolutionary theory, of national liberation, nor of socialism because it weakens its hold on our oppression. So, in this sense it is a struggle in the realm of ideas.

Writing allows us to venture outside our oppression and not only visualize a world where our land is not is not occupied by the oppressor nation, but identify steps which overturn our oppression. The use of language is a rich medium full of a trove of expression and lessons. The use of figurative language for example, is understood in ways other than its literal meaning. Just like the word Aztlán when used today in discussing the Chicano@ national territory, we do not mean its HISTORICAL definition of the origin of the Mexica, rather of what it implies to the Chicano@ nation TODAY and is LAND.

The writer should understand words, their power and the contradictions. Paulo Freire defines the contradictions in words as "reflection and action" where they are fused together in a unity of opposites. Words are at once reflective and active in the consciousness of the reader, thus they become transformative. It is then no surprise when we read history and how books were targeted in oppressive societies, or how the CDCR states that "gang leaders" are held in the S.H.U's. It is then no surprise why the state would want to prevent leaders of the oppressed from advancing their knowledge and keeping revolutionary theory away from its S.H.U's. Amplified analysis of these concentration camps are needed more today. We know this because the state is attempting to smother this analysis so it is a signal to unleash it as never before.

Prison theoreticians can't theorize without the prison masses. Lumpen theory without the Lumpen ain't shit. Lumpen

theory should be one with, and provide a clear translation of the challenges within prisons and define ways to combat the oppressive constructs. This should be written from the oppressed perspective. This is the only way to locate a real remedy to our situation. Theory is important and its core theorizing is teaching and teaching is liberating. The essential act then of the theoretician is to help the people to liberate themselves, not in the physical sense at this stage, but through their ideas. Their thought should advance, grow and expand in ways that benefit the oppressed and distinguish the oppressor.

The oppressor nation understands the danger of a thinking Lumpen. This is because it will ultimately be the Lumpen and Third World people who finally put this baby to sleep. So prisoners have a major role in the future of this society, being of the Lumpen class, prisoners when politically conscious are amongst the state's biggest threats. Organized Lumpen are the states enemy. The state fully grasps this, its why so many are tortured in isolation concentration kamps. The prison writer when striking up theory, is almost like a translator who delivers these truths to these control units and beyond.

Oppressors Literature

As we begin to delve deeper into what a people's literature is, this analysis would not be complete without studying its opposite which is the oppressor's literature and propaganda. One cannot fully understand any phenomenon without also studying its opposite because one cannot know what propels the other to struggle.

First, it's important to understand that as prisoners our oppressor (the state) controls the media as far as main stream news outlets etc. The bourgeois press is the states mouthpiece so they support the states view on its war on the poor. The poor are often labeled as "criminals" and worse by the press. Because of the oppressors grip on power it has not just controlled the overall culture within U.S borders for hundreds of years, but we were all mostly born and raised with the oppressor's view of history, of world events, of what is right and wrong. The oppressor has framed what is morally right for us and our ancestors. We have all attended the oppressors "schools" (brainwash kamps) and have learned to act in self-destructing ways.

The oppressor has been so crafty that many Third World peoples have been brain-

washed into believing they are a part of the oppressor nation, even when they stand on land stolen from their people by this same oppressor. It's incredible. At some point in the process of consciousness the oppressed will be faced with some critical junctures in the path forward. Freire describes these predicaments of the oppressed as:

"Their ideal is to be men, but for them, to be men is to be oppressors.

This is their model of humanity, this phenomenon derives from the fact that the oppressed at a certain moment of their existential experience adopt an attitude of "adhesion" to the oppressor. Under these circumstances they cannot "consider" him sufficiently clearly to objectivize him to discover him "outside" themselves".....and Freire here even goes so far as saying "the one pole aspires not to liberation, but to identification with its opposite pole". (4)

So, Freire reveals that the reality of oppression can end up blurring the lines of oppressed vs oppressor to the point where some model the oppressor and seek out those same trinkets that lure the individualist out into the abyss. Rather than wanting to get free, the oppressed can end up wanting to be oppressors. This is the real danger that is at hand for any people who suffer oppression. This process is nothing new, it is no big shocker and is not being discovered in this writing because we can look back to history and see it re-appear over and over, it should then not surprise us if it arises in U.S. prisons.

When we are dealing with the oppressor's literature or press we have an uphill battle for sure. Writers are fighting a war of words, with the people's writers on one side and our oppressor's writers on the other side. So we should understand that one of their main weapons in these battles is to label us as "criminals." For most out in society the term "criminal" frightens them. Some prisoners may even become demoralized by this term, but we should understand this term since it is used against us so much.

"Crime" in the U.S. is debatable, because what is considered a crime in this society may not be a crime if this were another society. Crimes in the U.S. are political because we live in a political society. Because we live under an occupation, where the laws are the laws of the oppressor nation, the colonizers rules, it means its laws are questionable to say the least. When we

liberate our land and rid it of the oppressor we can install people's courts to determine what crime will be. Occupying another people's land will surely be seen as a crime.

One author described crime as follows:

"There can be no universal theory for "crime", because it is defined by the shifting boundaries of the law and law enforcement, and the objectives of a given ruling class". (5)

Here the author reveals how laws in any given society are created by those in power. In the U.S. the ruling class has created laws which in most cases reinforces the oppressive nature of our reality. The poor are criminalized in ways which secure the states grip on power. The term "criminal" is more if their propoganda which is used to divide the people and ensure that those on the bottom of the heap receive no support from anyone outside their class. So that even within one's particular nationality they are separated from the rest of their respective nation and looked down upon as a "criminal".

Because the oppressor controls the press and official documents as well as the laws they can write falsehood and not only will much of the public believe it but many prisoners may as well. Recently CDCR passed out a new "Notice of Change to Regulations" dated 6-9-15 which states in part:

"There is no 'solitary confinement' in California prisons and the SHU is not 'solitary confinement'. Many SHU inmates in fact have cellmates. The conditions of confinement in CDCR facilities, including the SHU have been reviewed and monitored by external agencies, including the office of the Inspector General".

I read this notice, which is becoming the rules to the prisons in Califas, and as I sat in solitary confinement I read about how the state is saying there is no solitary confinement. It made me think what our situation would be like if no prison writers existed and the only thing that people out in society learned about prisons was from the oppressor. It would be a sad situation.

The oppressor's press will continue to write, as CDCR Director Beard did in his op ed for the L.A. Times during our hunger strike. By prisoners not engaging in creating literature which promotes our struggles it will not make the oppressor stop its literary offensive, it will only give up this battlefield to the oppressor.

Conclusion:

REFLECTIONS ON CRIME AND CLASS

By Ed Mead

Walk around town in any major city in the U.S. and one can't help but notice the huge and seemingly growing number of homeless people living on the streets. This sight is particularly unnerving to me, a modern day Rip Van Winkle. I went into prison back in the mid 1970s, and came out nearly twenty years later to a very different world.

Before I went to prison a person could hitchhike from place to place without a second thought. In one trip I hitched from Buffalo, New York to San Francisco, and then on up to Seattle, and in the process met a wonderful culture of people who traveled around the country in this way. Back in those days we could happily talk to people we passed on the streets. We even had the luxury to smile and speak to children we didn't know. In today's era I can safely speak to a dog passing me on the sidewalk, but not to the person walking the animal. I shudder to think about the possible consequences of speaking to some stranger's child. If this country's fear has gotten this bad since the mid-1970s, how bad it will become in another twenty years?

Back in the day, as a youthful revolutionary, I was prepared to risk imprisonment or worse in an effort to bring about a better world. My peers and I felt the risks were a better alternative than continuing to live under the boot of capitalism's culture of death.

Today that culture is far worse. The system considerably more vicious, the nation's citizens more confused, and the level of social atomization has never been greater. One of the state's primary mechanisms for isolating us from each other is fear. And there is no fear greater than the fear of crime—no domestic segment bourgeois society is more demonized than the criminal. The alleged offender is no longer a part of "us" but rather suddenly becomes one of "them" (the other upon whom any evil can justly be visited). It is not enough that this demonized person be politically disenfranchised and held behind bars under constitutionally sanctioned conditions of slavery, the hapless offender must be also be subjected to endless forms of torture while in prison as well.

The first step in getting a better grasp on the crime/fear dynamic is to understand the dialectical processes involved—not the

Education is something that the state attempts to keep out of our reach if it in our true interests. Their attempts to ban publications and writings from prisoners in recent times reflects this. This is because revolutionary education leads to CONSCIOUSNESS. Consciousness is the key to one's deliverance from oppression of all types. Prison writers are the visionaries which take the prison experience and translate it to others in prison and outside of these concentration camps. The prison theoretician sees those paths which are not yet cut and inject theory into our world so that others can build on these thoughts.

One of our strengths even as prisoners is in our writing. This is one way that we express what cannot be expressed in any other way because of our location.

The prison writer captures history and enshrines it in annals of the people's thought. Imprisoned writers should propagate Lumpen thought and keep it moving toward complete liberation of the people.

There are many ways in which an oppressed people can struggle. Revolutionaries in Turkey for example had their armed underground wing "Kurdistan Workers Party" (PKK), which has an urban semi-underground wing called "Union of Communities in Kurdistan" (KCK) and an above ground liberal wing called "Peace Democracy Party" (BDP) which has seats in the Turkish Parliament. They correctly understand that there is a need for the oppressed to struggle on different levels. This is because there are different spheres to the oppressor.

Prison writers need to be unleashed and work toward combatting the state propaganda. We need our own press and our own cadre of powerful writers. ●

NOTES:

1. Mao Tse-Tung, "On Protracted War" (May 1938)
2. Mao Tse-Tung, "Some Questions Concerning Methods of Leadership" (June 1, 1943). Selected Works, Vol. 3, page 119
3. V.I. Lenin. THE ESSENTIAL WORKS OF LENIN, "State and Revolution", Bantam Books, pages 348-349
4. "Pedagogy of the Oppressed", By Paul Freire, H&H paper books, page 30.
5. "Shackled and Chained : Mass Incarceration in Capitalist America " By Eugene Puryear, (PSL Publications 2013) page 129

ongoing media-driven hysteria. What constitutes a crime is not some fixed set of proscribed behaviors, but rather changes with time and the class nature of the then existing social order. Both ancient Greece and Rome, for example, were societies based upon the state-supported economic system of slavery. A slave owner during that period would be perfectly within his legal rights to murder one or more of his slaves. He could premeditatedly kill them for punishment or for the mere pleasure of watching them die. The law of the day protected his right to dispose of his property in any way he saw fit.

Today, getting rich from the surplus value created by your employees is looked upon as one of bourgeois society's highest virtues. In tomorrow's working class social order, on the other hand, that sort of behavior will be criminally repugnant. Just as what we call first-degree premeditated murder was behavior protected by the power of the state under the system of slavery, so too in a future social order acts seen as virtuous today will be looked upon as criminal behavior tomorrow. Indeed, in a future communist society it will rightfully be a crime for one person to materially profit from the labor of another.

Just as the definitions of crime can change with the class basis of the existing social order, so too does it's punishments. Today's capitalist system engenders myriad schemes for separating the working class from its hard-earned money, ranging from telemarketing scams to the usury committed by banks and credit card companies.

Some of these are legal and some are not. When such crimes are punished it is only lightly, usually a fine of some sort. General Motors just paid a fine to the government for knowingly continuing to use a faulty ignition switch that has killed over a hundred people. No prison for them, only a fine.

The same is true for punishments against corporations and wealthy individuals. Indeed, a rich person has never been executed in all of American history. Yet in all class societies up until now, the crimes of the poor are punished far more harshly. This disparity in punishment is applied with a vengeance during periods of social instability.

In feudal England it became a crime punishable by death to commit such petty offenses as killing a rabbit on private land,

chopping down a tree on a public lane, or picking a pocket. These draconian punishments have never worked. History records groups of pick pockets gleefully plying their trade on crowds gathered to watch the hanging of a fellow pick pocket.

When General Licinius Crassus impaled the heads of Spartacus and thousands of rebellious followers on spikes along the road to Rome, his doing so did not save the system of slavery or the Roman Empire that lived off it. Nor did murdering hapless pick pockets save the British monarchy from the onslaught of capitalist productive relations. Similarly, the adoption of harsh three-strikes legislation, the gutting of constitutional protections, and the ongoing expansion of the death penalty etc., will not save the moribund system of international capitalism. Yet if history is any teacher, we can expect ever harsher punishments and still fewer legal safeguards for accused criminals or others who seek to implement a radical transformation of existing class relations.

While the ruling class makes good use of the existence of crime (by keeping people isolated by fear from each other), they do not want the presence of crime any more than we do. Nobody wants crime. Still, in a social order in which one-half of one percent own more than ninety percent of the nation's property, resources, and productive capacity (not to mention control of the means of education and information), it is understandable that those who have the least will take some stumbling steps to restore a more natural balance of the wealth.

The rich fully understand that crime is a force, not unlike that of electricity or running water, and as such it will follow the path of least resistance. It even has a natural direction too—against property (ninety percent of all crimes are against property). Through the mechanism of increased resistance required to attack their property interests, the ruling class effectively channels the force of crime back on to the poor. The rich live in remote, gated communities; their banks have armed guards, sophisticated alarm systems, and are protected by the jurisdiction of the federal courts and the investigative techniques of the F.B.I.

Since crime tends to follow the course of least resistance, the social effect of these and numerous other security measures is to redirect the force of crime back on to the poor. Hence the dramatic increase in both the level and intensity of poor-on-poor crime. And with the advent of ever less

expensive and more available surveillance mechanisms and alarm systems, the force of crime is being steadily pushed further and further into our poorest minority communities. We can expect this trend to continue until every home (or car) that can afford it will be an electronic fortress.

How are progressives to respond to this situation? A starting point would be to organize our communities so as to redirect the force of crime back up against those elements responsible for its development—the rich. We cannot today implement the economically just society necessary for the ultimate elimination of crime. Without that foundation, without control of the means of information and education, we can only work to redirect the force of crime back up against those who created the conditions for its development.

The political consciousness of the under-culture needs to be raised to a point that makes preying on the poor not cool or even dangerous for those confused victims of capitalism who steal from or otherwise victimize their impoverished neighbors.

The message must be: “Rather than ripping off that old woman for her monthly sustenance check, take your needs to those who can better afford to pay.” Prisoners should especially be involved in this process. Their lack of class-consciousness is clearly reflected by the fact that there is currently no stigma attached if you are in prison for cannibalizing your own community, there is one for being a rapist or child molester. But in fact there should be no stigma on the basis of one's crime. When you do that you are engaging in extra judicial punishment. We all know that punishment is ineffective and wrong. It is what the state advocates. By stigmatizing or otherwise punishing your peers you are unwittingly furthering the interests of the state.

Instead, those who prey on their own class should be made a part of study groups so that they can become class conscious. Rapists must organize other rapists so they too can study feminist literature and become able to internalize class and gender politics – so they too can become a part of the solution.

On the outside we can start laying the foundation for dual power by policing our communities (without collaboration with the state's apparatus of repression). Taking control of our neighborhoods is an important part of increasing the resistance that will ultimately direct crime back up against

the rich. When the movement finally develops again, class-conscious ex-convicts would take leadership in this community protection process. And those still on the inside would hold study groups for their peers on issues of class, race, and the various manifestations of sexism. Although we can't yet eliminate crime, we can at least start the process of making it more class conscious.

Maybe one day I will be able to walk down the street and be able to smile and say hello to the person walking his dog, and to give a warm greeting and a pat on the head to those children who need a whole community to love them. Maybe I can stick out my thumb and meet many new friends as I travel the land. While a revolution is necessary, right now I would be happy to get back to the place where society's head was at in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Of course, back then I thought things were so bad that I risked death and a life of imprisonment to try and overthrow the system. •

ON THE ASHKER SETTLEMENT

By Ed Mead

There is a small division within the outside prisoner support community with respect to the settlement agreement reached in *Todd Ashker, et al. versus Governor of California, et al.*, Case Number 4:09-cv-05796-CW. Most of the community and all of the plaintiffs believe this was a “great victory.” There is a small minority, on the other hand, who believe the plaintiffs threw future SHU prisoners under the bus in order to get themselves out. I am a member of this small minority.

This matter was certified as a class action law suit. The class primarily consists of California prisoners who have been in the Pelican Bay SHU for ten years or longer solely on the basis of their alleged gang affiliation. According to the affidavit of Jules Lobel, the lead counsel in the case, “This settlement was reached “without any admission or concession by Defendants [CDCR] of any current and ongoing violations of a federal right.”

Readers should not use the following criticisms to undermine the incredible work the plaintiffs have done in mounting three historic struggles. Nor should anyone denigrate the importance of the Agreement to End Hostilities. These were monumental accomplishments. After decades of solitary

confinement, for the victims of such long term confinement it was indeed a great victory. They are being released from the SHU.

The first draft of this review was pulled after speaking with Mr. Lobel for an hour on the phone, and also with several members of the Bay Area's Prisoner Hunger Strike Solidarity (PHSS) coalition.

I pulled the original criticism because I made a factual error in my review. The error was rooted in an incorrect assumption; I assumed the original complaint was attacking indefinite SHU confinement for everyone, not only for gang types. It had never occurred to me that they would challenge only their own indefinite SHU placement and leave indefinite SHU intact for everyone else (for the much wider net CDCR now has under its STG farce).

You know how prison officials twist things to make them sound better. Like CDC becoming CDCR. Here is an example from the "Important Notice" on the settlement [to be] posted in all SHU units. Read the following two quoted sentences carefully. On the "Notice" they say "all SHU or Step Down Program placements of validated CDCR prisoners shall be based *solely* (my emphasis) on a conviction of a SHU-eligible offense..." Sound good. Now here is the same language as stated on page five the actual settlement, it states that you can be locked down "...for proven STG behavior, and not *solely* (emphasis mine) on the inmate's validation status or level of STG affiliation." Does this mean the state can still use your validation status against you if there is other evidence that you're a bad guy? The key word here in both instances is "solely" and how it is used.

Behavior Modification is a crime. The SHU, even imprisonment itself, is a sick and unnatural existence. The purpose of these adjustment oriented programs is to trick you in to adjusting to that sickness. Participating in such an alienating experience is damaging to your mental health, wellbeing, and sense of identity. Prisoners who advocate support for the state's behavior modification programs should be exposed for the collaborators they are. Collaborators are exposed by posting little news sheets criticizing their crimes against prisoners. Violence should not be used.

On the one hand CDCR has their divide and conquer strategy to suppress prisoners' rights; they used this very effectively against prisoners for decades by pitting race against race. Then, on the other hand,

they use the old carrot and the stick approach. In this case the carrot is that many gang-identified SHU prisoners get out after decades of confinement.

On page 8 of the agreement, section C, paragraph 25: "Within twelve months of the Court's preliminary approval of the Agreement, CDCR shall review the cases of all validated inmates who are currently in the SHU..." Those who have served the longest will be reviewed first. "If an inmate has not been found guilty of a SHU-eligible rule violation with a proven STG nexus within the last 24 months, he shall be released from the SHU and transferred to a General Population level IV 180-design facility, or other general population institution consistent with his case factors."

What is a "SHU-related offense"? Attachment B to the settlement, the "SHU Term Assessment Chart", contains two and a quarter pages of such offenses. Here are some examples: creating a disturbance, strike, leading a disturbance or strike, or inciting conditions that might impact institutional security. In other words, any meaningful step that might be taken help to improve your conditions of existence is a SHU-related offense.

That's not fair of me as you can still beg the courts, legislature or governor to treat you like human beings. You can clearly see how well that approach has worked out for prisoners over the past 240 years of U.S. history. Hell, why not try this same futile approach for another 260 years, and make it an even 500?

As Mumia Abu-Jamal pointed out, "...jailhouse lawyers often unwittingly serve the interests of the state by propagating the illusion of 'justice' and 'equity' in a system devoted to neither." They create "illusions of legal options as pathways to both individual and collective liberation."

You've had the carrot, now here's the stick. Paragraph 29 starts out by saying "An inmate may be retained in the SHU and placed on Administrative SHU status after serving a determinate SHU sentence if it has been determined by the Departmental Review Board that the inmate's case factors are such that..." blah, blah, blah, you are the worst of the worst. The old Indefinite SHU been changed to the new Administrative SHU, which is also indefinite. There is a difference, however, as now the state must have "compelling evidence" that you are the worst of the worst before condemning you to indefinite SHU. But hey, only for the worst of the worst, right?

Nothing significant has really changed. One set of alleged gang related people are released from SHU while a new group of STG types come in (or maybe even some of the same people).

At present all prisoners have are promises from CDCR—you know, like the promises they made to end the first two hunger strikes. Yes, you say, but aren't these promises enforceable by the courts? We'll see about that. How many times did the *Castillo* plaintiffs have to return to court in an effort to enforce the agreement in that case, before the courts finally said to hell with the prisoners? Besides, other than the release of the plaintiff's class, what is there to be won by going back to court? The farm (indefinite SHU) has already been sold for a bag a magic beans.

As stated on the back page of every issue of the *Prison Focus* newspaper, in addition to eliminating human rights abuses, we work "with the goal of ending long-term isolation..." This agreement not only fails to do that, it isn't even a baby step in the direction of ending long term solitary confinement. Our job is not to make the SHUs more comfortable or replace one set of SHU prisoners for another and call it good. No! The SHUs must be shut down and converted into something like honor housing. Only the unity and non-violent struggle of prisoners can make this happen; not the courts, the legislature, or the governor. Remember, self-reliance in all things. It is what has gotten you this far, and you've come a long ways.

Indefinite SHU is still exists for the worse of the worst. Today's "worse of the worst" have been or will soon be released to GP or into some behavior modification program. Their empty cells will be filled with tomorrow's "worst of the worst." Maybe in ten or twenty years the new batch of the "worst" will file yet another law suit around the issue of indefinite confinement in the SHU. And the beat goes on, and on...

Only the gangs appear to have the authority to cause 33,000 prisoners to stop eating for a day. How will that authority be used now? Here is what I can tell you as a fact: **In the absence of class-based politics any leadership in this culture, black, brown, or white, no matter how well they talk that talk, will lead you to your knees.** What does that mean? It means the most they can achieve will be some token or cosmetic reforms (such as those in the settlement agreement). This is true not only for prisoners, but applies to folks out here

in minimum custody as well.

I see the settlement as a defeat for the long term goals of California prisoners. They agreed to settle for continued indefinite SHU and placed their blessing on the state's use of behavior modification programs against prisoners. While the current generation of long-term SHU occupants will be released to some level of GP, I find myself wondering what future generations of indefinite (worst of the worst) SHU prisoners will have to say about this agreement and the inmates who signed their names to that document.

I do not criticize the plaintiffs for failing to take the case to trial, although I would have liked to see that happen. It was totally up to them to make that call. If this case had gone to trial, however, the public education potential would have been tremendous.

What jury would have held that keeping a human being locked up for decades in a tiny, windowless box is okay, especially since the evidence needed to do so was in so many cases non-existent? Imagine a courtroom packed with supporters.

There have been many recent studies pointing out the destructive nature of long-term solitary confinement, even U.S. Supreme Court Justice Kennedy and president Obama have come out opposed to its use. As has the United Nations' human rights experts.

What might have happened had there been a trial is mere speculation. What is for sure, however, is that indefinite SHU and behavior modification programs are here to stay unless some intervening force intercedes. At present I see no force inside capable of making that happen.

So once again the question of where to go from here raises its ugly head. Rightly or wrongly, I believe the historic struggle of California prisoners was a once-in-a-lifetime event, and that it is now, for all intents and purposes, dead.

To make matters worse, we out here on the streets contributed to that defeat through our uncritical support for some of the most reactionary and backwards prisoners in the nation (some were progressive, but were swayed by our uncritical support for these backwards elements). This is not only about the classless leadership on the inside, but also the liberal approach to this struggle by outside supporters in the Bay Area who should have known better—the apologists for prisoners who may have had a hand in Hugo's murder.

I have criticized both CPF and PHSS for

their reliance on these gang leaders to the near total exclusion of progressive (Marxist) forces on the inside. My criticisms were shrugged off, as if I'm some sort of nut who does not understand the dynamics of the prison struggle. After a year or so ago I gave up trying.

And for you who think I'm full of shit, let me quote from a letter I received in today's mail. The writer wants a statement on how long he'd been receiving the *Rock* newsletter. "You see," he says, "I've been issued a Rules Violation Report for possession of an edition of *Rock* that contained an interview of George Jackson by Dr. Tolberi Small; the specific charge is Possession of Security Threat Group-I Material." He asked that I "assist him ASAP to keep me out of the SHU." The gangs go out and the STGs come in. A "great victory" for some. For victims of the now prisoner-ratified STG thing? I think not.

Much of the PHSS coalition and CPF is made up of liberals who don't know any better. They cannot be blamed. For them, trailing after the prisoners is just fine. But as Mao Zedong says, "It is to the advantage of despots to keep people ignorant; it is to our advantage to make them intelligent. We must lead all of them gradually away from ignorance." Instead, the outside support community uncritically trailed after these backwards prisoners.

I can understand why Marxists would also trail after the prisoners, without any effort to raise their class consciousness in the process. I'm not blameless here, as in the beginning I also got caught up in it all. •

ANOTHER WORD ABOUT HUGO

George Monbiot once said: "If we were to judge the U.S. by its penal policies we would perceive a strange beast: a Christian society that believes in neither forgiveness nor redemption." Evidently our gang leaders are even worse than the state when it comes to extra-judicial punishments. You'd think the victims of the state's system of continuous punishment (the prisoners) would be above imitating their captors in this regard, but then you'd be wrong.

Hugo's history is of one who has transformed himself through politics." Whether Hugo was killed for his rape conviction or because he associated with Black prisoners, in either case it's bad. Prisoners taking

on the role of the pigs and adding extra-judicial punishment on their fellow prisoners due to the nature of their crime? Please! Or worse, killing someone because of the race they choose to associate with? Give me a fucking break! Not only are you dudes some sick puppies, by dividing prisoners in this manner you are serving the interests of the pigs. A politically conscious California prisoner wrote and says:

"In the California prison system, Blacks (all the different sub-groups) 'don't clean up after themselves', that is, they tolerate child molesters, rapists, rats, etc., whereas every other race and their respective sub-groups, will put them on a 'Hit' list for life. They usually get found out and are 'stuck' or they go straight into protective custody (or what's called SNY). As for Hugo, despite his Nicaraguan heritage, he identified with Blacks.

"And here we go again. Had the gang leaders who you, the support coalition, and the like, propped-up and egged on with uncritical praises, had spent these last several years truly developing consciousness, there's a very real chance that Hugo wouldn't have been stabbed. As for the hit on Hugo, the fact is that individuals cannot, and do not, hit another race (not even their own race) without the "go-ahead" from the leaders.

"Because of the total absence of [class-based] political consciousness, the leaders are truly incapable of distinguishing between objective reality, i.e., truth and abstract notions divorced from the concrete world. For example, the gang leadership, and especially the whites, believe they have achieved a "monumental victory."

"We are Marxists! It is our job not only to speak for the people, but more importantly, to guide them. If the masses are politically ignorant and you simply parrot and regurgitate that ignorance, we in effect become agents of the very status quo we are claiming to change. Intentions are 'subjective', and accurate measure requires us to be as objective as possible.

"Those of us with a significantly high degree of political consciousness sat by quietly while our so-called leadership had their way with the pages of the *Rock* and *Prison Focus* while we cheered and egged them on from the side lines. No one ever offered a con-

structive criticism.

As for your criticism of the *Ashker* settlement, it needs to be said. Although we're a day late and a dollar short. But I guess I would ask why? What's to be accomplished? It's over. This struggle was a once-in-a-lifetime event, and that's why it was so important for us to use every article written as an opportunity to write our own in an effort to raise consciousness. We are in fact worse off now because the STG allows the state to cast a much wider net than previously.

Although we are so few in number, nearly all of our politically conscious comrades buckled under the weight of the praises being sung in the name of the vilest reaction. Even those who know better, comrades who have spilt blood in the name of transforming our world, lost sight of our objective and forgot their role in all of this. We started off so strong, yet we are responsible for planting the seeds that were later to be cultivated, harvested, and hijacked."

If the letter writer is correct, that Black prisoners don't "clean up after themselves", then my hearty congratulations go out to those prisoners for not falling for the man's game of promoting prisoner-on-prisoner violence.

As for the rest of you knuckleheads, you expose, isolate, and shun rats. You do not attack other prisoners on the basis of their alleged crimes. That's double jeopardy and it's wrong. Those who advocate this wrong-headedness are objectively agents of the state and should be treated accordingly. •

FINAL EDITORIAL

Dear reader, we are breaking up. No, it's not you. It's me. That said, welcome to the last issue of *Rock!* As I close out the fourth year of publication I figured this would be a good time to stop putting it out. The first year of *Rock* was not difficult because I had lots of money and didn't especially care whether or not prisoners sent me stamps or checks. As we entered into years two and three financial contributions kicked in, and for a period of about a year prisoners completely supported the costs of printing and mailing the newsletter each month.

At the end of last year, and more so this year, contributions have significant-

ly dropped off. For over a year now I've been paying all of the costs for the printing, while prisoners have been donating the stamps needed to mail the publication out each month. Now those stamps have also all but stopped coming in. I had to buy stamps in order to mail out the last issue.

I would say the fault for the drop in donations was mine were it not for the fact that I've not changed over the years—I'm still the same cranky old commie I've always been. Instead the absence of contributions speaks volumes about the headset of prisoners in California.

In 1776 Adam Smith wrote *An Inquiry Into The Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*. In that book he makes it clear that the purpose of government is preserve inequality: "Laws and governments may be considered in this and indeed in every case as a combination of the rich to oppress the poor, and preserve to themselves the inequality of the goods which would otherwise be soon destroyed by the attacks of the poor, who if not hindered by government would soon reduce the others to an equality with themselves by open violence."

Outside folks who may wish to read back issues can do so at rocknewsletter.com. I'll leave the site up for another three years (the Web hosting is paid up for that long). I'll also have back issues of *¡Basta Ya!* and some early copies of the *PHSS News* (both of which I edited before starting *Rock*). I am planning to step down as the editor of *Prison Focus* as well, once they find and train a replacement. Back issues of *Prison Focus* can be found at www.prisons.org/ publications.

I've always enjoyed doing this paper. With that said, I am out of here. Remember, self-reliance in all things. •

BLACK STUDENTS UNITED CALLS FOR PRISON DIVESTMENT

By Zachary Silver, November 10, 2015

Twelve students from Black Students United—a student-run umbrella organization representing the interests of black Cornellians—entered President Elizabeth Garrett's office Tuesday to submit a letter outlining demands for the University to divest its endowment from interests based in prisons and mass incar-

ceration. The letter launches the group's public campaign to fight Cornell's involvement with organizations related to the "violence of the prison industry and mass incarceration," according to BSU.

"Black students at Cornell and those on campuses across the world have a history of holding their universities accountable," said Amber Aspinall '17, political action chair of BSU. "We will continue that tradition."

In their letter, BSU outlined four major demands of the University. They insist that the University cease investments in companies that include Corrections Corporation of America, GEO Group Inc. and G4S USA Secure Solution; no longer use the G4S security system in the Herbert F. Johnson Museum of Art; issue an official University statement on Cornell's involvement with the private prison industry and grant organizers a meeting with the University's Investment Committee.

"We very cordially invite President Garrett, as well as the rest of the administration and any interested trustees to help build this very important dialogue on campus regarding the private prison industry and the prison industrial complex," said Robert Johnson, a BSU political action member.

Highlighting Cornell's prior involvement with apartheid South Africa and JanSport, the letter stated concerns that Cornell's decision to invest in organizations related to prisons and mass incarceration creates discomfort for students.

"What we want to know—and what many students, faculty and community members want to know—is where our policymakers stand on this issue and what common ground we can find to ensure that Cornell's relationship with the criminal justice system is one that truly reflects the values and spirit of this University," Johnson said.

The BSU movement at Cornell was inspired by a similar movement at Columbia University, where student activists successfully campaigned for the university to become the first college in the United States to divest from private prison companies, according to the letter.

"We hope you join us in extending our sincerest congratulations to the student activists at Columbia for their dedication, passion and skilled organizing," the letter reads.

While Garrett was not on campus at the time of the letter drop, BSU activists cite

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her inauguration address as a positive indication that she will be open to working towards progress, according to the letter.

“Among your most salient words, however, was your call on Cornell to be ‘radical and progressive,’” the letter says. “We are prepared to answer that call. We hope that you are as well.”

BSU is requesting a response from the University by Nov. 23, and hopes that a response will increase transparency on the issue of private prison investments, according to Abraham Araya '19, a BSU political action member.

“Private prisons turn black lives into commodities,” said Delmar Fears '19, a freshman representative. “I don’t want to attend a university that says they support and welcome black students, while reaping the profits from a corrupt system that disproportionately disenfranchises the black community. They can’t say and do both; something has to change.”

<http://cornellsun.com/2015/11/10/black-students-united-calls-for-prison-divestment>

JUDGE GETS TIME

Prosecutor Sends Innocent Man to Prison Who Served 25 years, Now a Judge, he gets 10 days in Jail

On October 27th in Texas, former prosecutor and judge Ken Anderson pled guilty to intentionally failing to disclose evidence in a case that sent an innocent man, Michael Morton, to prison for the murder of his wife. When trying the case as a prosecutor, Anderson possessed evidence that may have cleared Morton, including statements from the crime's only eyewitness that Morton wasn't the culprit. Anderson sat on this evidence, and then watched Morton get convicted. While Morton remained in prison for the next 25 years, Anderson's career flourished, and he eventually became a judge. In today's deal, Anderson pled to criminal contempt and spend 10 days in jail. ●

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/mark-godsey/for-the-first-time-ever-a_b_4221000.html

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