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★ Working to Extend Democracy to All ★

★ Volume 4, Number 5 ★

★ May 2015 ★

BOYCOTT CORPORATIONS THAT FEED ON PRISONS

By Chris Hedges

All attempts to reform mass incarceration through the traditional mechanisms of electoral politics, the courts and state and federal legislatures are useless. Corporations, which have turned mass incarceration into a huge revenue stream and which have unchecked political and economic power, have no intention of diminishing their profits. And in a system where money has replaced the vote, where corporate lobbyists write legislation and the laws, where chronic unemployment and underemployment, along with inadequate public transportation, sever people in marginal communities from jobs, and where the courts are a wholly owned subsidiary of the corporate state, this demands a sustained, nationwide revolt.

“Organizing boycotts, work stoppages inside prisons and the refusal by prisoners and their families to pay into the accounts of phone companies and commissary companies is the only weapon we have left,” said

Amos Caley, who runs the Interfaith Prison Coalition, a group formed by prisoners, the formerly incarcerated, their families and religious leaders. “Mass incarceration is the most important civil rights issue of our day. And it is time for communities of faith to stand with poor people, mostly of color, who are unfairly exploited and abused. We must halt human rights violations against the poor that grow more pronounced each year,” Caley said here. He and other prison reform leaders spoke Saturday at the Elmwood Presbyterian Church.

“All the companies that use prison labor have to be boycotted.”

“We have to shut down the system,” said Gale Muhammad, another speaker and the founder and CEO of Women Who Never Give Up. “All the companies that use prison labor have to be boycotted. And we can’t stop there. We have to boycott the vending machines in the prisons and the phone companies. We have to stop spending our money. Until we hit them in the pocket they won’t listen.”

Former prisoners and prisoners’ relatives—suffering along with the incarcerated under the weight of one of the most exploitative, physically abusive and largest prison systems in the world, frustrated and enraged by the walls that corporations have set in place to stymie rational judicial reform—joined human rights advocates at the church to organize state and nationwide boycotts inside and outside prisons. These boycotts, they said, will be directed against the private phone, money transfer and com-

missary companies, and against the dozens of corporations that exploit prison labor. The boycotts will target food and merchandise vendors, construction companies, laundry services, uniforms companies, prison equipment vendors, cafeteria services, manufacturers of pepper spray, body armor and the array of medieval instruments used for the physical control of prisoners, and a host of other contractors that profit from mass incarceration. The movement will also call on institutions, especially churches and universities, to divest from corporations that use prison labor.

The campaign, led by the Interfaith Prison Coalition, will include a call to pay all prisoners at least the prevailing minimum wage of the state in which they are held. (New Jersey’s minimum wage is \$8.38 an hour.) Wages inside prisons have remained stagnant and in real terms have declined over the past three decades. A prisoner in New Jersey makes, on average, \$1.20 for eight hours of work, or about \$28 a month. Those incarcerated in for-profit prisons earn as little as 17 cents an hour. Over a similar period, phone and commissary corporations have increased fees and charges often by more than 100 percent.

There are nearly 40 states that allow private corporations to exploit prison labor. And prison administrators throughout the country are lobbying corporations that have sweatshops overseas, trying to lure them into the prisons with guarantees of even cheaper labor and a total absence of organizing or coordinated protest.

Corporations currently exploiting prison labor include Abbott Laboratories, AT&T, AutoZone, Bank of America, Bayer, Berk-

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shire Hathaway, Cargill, Caterpillar, Chevron, the former Chrysler Group, Costco Wholesale, John Deere, Eddie Bauer, Eli Lilly, ExxonMobil, Fruit of the Loom, GEICO, GlaxoSmithKline, Glaxo Wellcome, Hoffmann-La Roche, International Paper, JanSport, Johnson & Johnson, Kmart, Koch Industries, Mary Kay, McDonald's, Merck, Microsoft, Motorola, Nintendo, Pfizer, Procter & Gamble, Quaker Oats, Sarah Lee, Sears, Shell, Sprint, Starbucks, State Farm Insurance, United Airlines, UPS, Verizon, Victoria's Secret, Wal-Mart and Wendy's.

Prisons in America are a hugely profitable business. And since profit is the only language the involved corporations know how to speak, we will have to speak to them in the language they understand. In New Jersey the first boycott will be directed against Global Tel Link, a private phone company that charges prisoners and their families exorbitant rates and that has a monopoly. Organizers at the Saturday event, including Gale Muhammad, called on prisoners and families to stop paying into Global Tel Link accounts and boycott the prison phone service. She urged families and prisoners to write letters to each other until the company's phone rates match those paid by the wider society.

"Prisoner telephone rates in New Jersey are some of the highest in the country," Caley said. "Global Tel Link charges prisoners and their families \$4.95 for a 15-minute phone call, which is about two and a half times the national average for local inmate calling services."

Prison phone services are a \$1.2-billion-a-year industry. Prisoners outside New Jersey are charged by Global Tel Link, which makes about \$500 million a year, as much as \$17 for a 15-minute phone call. A call of that duration outside a prison would cost about \$2. If a customer deposits \$25 into a Global Tel Link phone account, he or she must pay an additional service charge of \$6.95. And Global Tel Link is only one of several large corporations that exploit prisoners and their families. JPay is a corporation that deals in privatized money transfers to prisoners. It controls money transfers for about 70 percent of the prison population. The company charges families that put money into prisoners' accounts additional service fees of as much as 45 percent. JPay generates more than \$50 million a year in revenue. The Keefer Group, which controls prison commissaries in more than 800 public and private prisons, and which often

charges prisoners double what items cost outside prison walls, makes \$41 million a year in profit. All of these companies have to be targeted.

It will be a long and hard battle. It will require tremendous sacrifices from those who have loved ones who are incarcerated and from the 2.3 million locked in cages in the United States' vast archipelagos of prisons. It will require those on the outside to boycott corporations that use prison labor and corporations that gouge prisoners and their families. It will require us to build networks to support prisoners when they begin, as they must, to carry out work stoppages to demand the minimum wage. Building a movement is our only hope.

Michelle Alexander, the author of "The New Jim Crow," is outspoken about the imperative for organizing to fight back. In a speech at Union Theological Seminary in New York City in March she told her audience: "Jesus taught that he who is without sin should cast the first stone. Well, we have become a nation of stone throwers. And in this era of mass incarceration it is not enough to drop your stone. We have to be willing to catch the stones raining down on the most vulnerable. And we must be willing to stand up to the stone throwers and disarm them."

Global Tel Link charges \$4.95 for a 15-minute phone call

"I believe we now find ourselves at a fork in the road," she went on. "We can continue down the road most traveled of business and politics as usual, the path of reforming our political institutions here and there, the path Dr. King was determined to leave behind, or we can choose a different path, the rocky, dangerous path that comes without a map. It is a path that is beckoning us again, thanks in large part to the courage of the young people in Ferguson who stood up when Michael Brown was shot down. It inspired thousands of people to wake up, get up and march here in New York City and beyond. If we choose this rocky path there will be no guidebooks, no map, no instructions. All we will have is our moral compass and the whispering of our angels and our ancestors in our ears reminding us to dig for deeper truths and to speak and to act with greater courage, reminding us, in the words of Dr. James Cone, that humanity's salvation is available only through our solidarity with the crucified people in our

midst."

She called on the audience to "speak difficult and unpopular truths," not to avoid "the racial dimensions or the profound moral questions for purposes of expediency" and not to seek "justice on the cheap."

"We can and we must build a movement, and not only [about] mass incarceration and mass deportation, but a broad-based radical, human rights movement that ends once and for all our history's cycle of creating caste-like systems in America, a movement for education, not incarceration, for jobs, not jails, a movement to end all forms of legal discrimination against people released from prison, discrimination that denies them basic human rights to work, to shelter, to food, a movement for voting rights for all, including those behind bars ... a movement that will end the war on drugs, once and for all, and shift to a public health model dealing with drug addiction and drug abuse, a movement that will stand up to the police unions and transform the police itself from warriors into peace officers directly accountable to the communities they serve, a movement that will ensure that every dollar saved from ending the wars that have been declared on poor communities of color, the wars on crime and drugs, will be invested back into these communities, the communities most harmed, meaningful reparations and justice reinvestment, a movement that abandons our purely punitive approach to dealing with violence and violent crimes and embraces a more restorative and rehabilitative approach ... a movement that is rooted in the dignity and humanity of us all, no matter who we are, where we come from or what we may have done."

At Saturday's gathering in Newark, among the roughly 100 participants were leading advocates for prison reform such as Bonnie Kerness, the director of the American Friends Service Committee Prison Watch Project; Gale Muhammad; and Larry Hamm, the chairman of People's Organization for Progress. There were mothers and fathers of incarcerated sons and daughters, former prisoners including Earl Amin, who was leader of the Black Panthers in Newark and spent 34 years in prison solely for discussing the possibility of carrying out a bank robbery, and Ojore Lutalo, who was in the Black Liberation Army and spent 22 years in solitary confinement in Trenton's supermax prison. There was universal and emphatic agreement that if we do not organize to destroy this country's system of

mass incarceration it will spread like a cancer, destroying more lives, more families and more communities.

The corporate state seeks to reduce all workers at home and abroad to the status of prison labor. Workers are to be so heavily controlled that organizing unions or resistance will become impossible. Benefits, pensions, overtime are to be abolished. Workers who are not slavishly submissive to the will of corporate power will be dismissed. There will be no sick days or paid vacations. No one will be able to challenge unsafe and physically difficult working conditions. And wages will be suppressed to keep workers in poverty. This is the goal of corporate power. The 1 million prisoners employed at substandard wages by corporations inside prisons are, in the eyes of our corporate masters, the ideal workers. And those Americans who ignore the plight of prison labor and refuse to organize against it will increasingly find prison working conditions replicated outside prison walls.

Prisons, to swell corporate profits, force prisoners to pay for basic items including shoes. Prisoners in New Jersey pay \$45 for a pair of basic Reebok shoes—almost twice the average monthly wage. If a prisoner needs an insulated undergarment or an extra blanket to ward off the cold at night he must buy it. Packages from home, once permitted, have been banned to force prisoners to buy grossly overpriced items at the commissary or company-run store. Some states have begun to charge prisoners rent. This gouging is burying many prisoners and their families in crippling debt, debt that prisoners carry when they are released from prison.

The United States has 2.3 million people in prison, 25 percent of the world's prison population, although we are only 5 percent of the world's population. We have increased our prison population by about 700 percent since 1970. Corporations control about 18 percent of federal prisoners and 6.7 percent of all state prisoners. And corporate prisons account for nearly all newly built prisons. Nearly half of all immigrants detained by the federal government are shipped to corporate-run prisons. And slavery is legal in prisons under the 13th Amendment of the U.S. Constitution. It reads: "Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist within the United States."

Vast sums are at stake. The for-profit prison industry is worth \$70 billion. Cor-

rections Corporation of America (CCA), the largest owner of for-profit prisons and immigration detention facilities in the country, had revenues of \$1.7 billion in 2013 and profits of \$300 million. CCA holds an average of 81,384 inmates in its facilities on any one day. Aramark Holdings Corp., a Philadelphia-based company that contracts through Aramark Correctional Services to provide food to 600 correctional institutions across the United States, was acquired in 2007 for \$8.3 billion by investors that included Goldman Sachs. And, as in the wider society, while members of a tiny, oligarchic corporate elite each are paid tens or even hundreds of millions of dollars annually, the workers who generate these profits live in misery.

"It is an abomination that prisoners are paid 22 cents an hour, \$1.20 cents a day," Larry Hamm told the Newark meeting. "Every prisoner should get the minimum wage of New Jersey, \$8.38 per hour."

He went on. "Even when you come out [of prison] it moves from slavery to sharecropping because they have these fines and obligations that they put on people. ... That is how sharecropping was. That is why a lot of our great-grandparents and grandparents couldn't leave the South. Everything was owned by the former slave master. If they bought a plow they ended up in debt over the plow. If they bought seeds they ended up in debt over the seeds. They were tied to the land. Probation is like sharecropping. You are off the plantation, but you still belong to us. And look at this rapacious, exploitative system where phone companies make 50 times what a phone call should cost. And people are charging high commissary fees.

"This is capitalist exploitation, and it must stop," Hamm thundered. "But it won't stop unless we build a movement to make it stop. Every organization that calls itself a civil rights or human rights organization, if they do not have the plight and condition of the incarcerated on their agenda they need to hand in their credentials."

Last week's call to launch nationwide boycotts signals the start of the most important frontal assault yet against the prison-industrial complex. I do not know if it will succeed. But I do know it is our only hope. Halting the abuse and exploitation of the poor inside prisons is not only the most important civil rights issue of our time, it promises to be a vital check against a corporate state that, if not dismantled, will imprison us all. ●

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On Jailhouse Lawyers

"...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."

Mumia Abu-Jamal,
JAILHOUSE LAWYERS: Prisoners
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WHY THE U.S. WON'T LET U.N. LOOK INSIDE ITS PRISONS

Sarah Shourd

After a half-decade and a mandate by the U.N. to investigate solitary confinement practices, U.N. torture rapporteur Juan Mendez had to find a backdoor into an American jail. Today, his findings are released in a report.

In 2010, Juan Mendez was appointed Special Rapporteur on Torture and other Cruel, Degrading and Inhumane Treatment by the United Nations. His mandate is wide in size and scope—to expose and document torture wherever it exists on the planet today.

Since the beginning of his mandate Mendez has made criticizing the overuse of solitary confinement a priority. In 2011, he issued a report stating that 22 or 23 hours a day alone in a prison cell for more than 15 days at a time can cause permanent, lasting psychological damage and can constitute torture.

This problem, he emphasized, is particularly severe in the U.S., where prisoners are routinely held under such conditions for months, years and even decades at a time. Many have never committed a violent crime.

Fast-forward five years. The U.S. government has yet to grant Mendez access to a single isolation pod in any U.S. prison. The clock is ticking. Mendez has a mere 20 months left of his term, and he has yet been able to substantiate his reports with a firsthand investigation.

“The U.S. was voted into the Human Rights Council—a position that carries with it an obligation to cooperate,” he says. When he speaks, Mendez wears a look of weary determination befitting of his post.

“I’m disappointed to still be waiting for the State Department to respond to my request. I’ve been waiting over two years.”

“That fact that he hasn’t received a response is contemptible,” says Laura Rovner, legal expert on prison conditions from University of Denver. “It puts the U.S. in the company of countries like Syria, Pakistan, and Russia that also have been unresponsive to requests for country visits.”

“Given the length of the delay,” Rovner continues. “You have to wonder about the reason, whether it’s motivated by concerns about what the Special Rapporteur will find inside these prisons.”

Then suddenly, last December, Mendez was allowed access to California’s Pelican

Bay State Prison—a facility known for keeping inmates in isolation indefinitely in its Security Housing Unit (SHU).

This visit did not come about through the official channels Mendez had long been appealing to, however. Instead, he found a way in to one of the most notorious prisons in the country through a kind of backdoor.

“I’m disappointed to still be waiting for the State Department to respond to my request. I’ve been waiting over two years.”

“I was allowed in as an expert,” Mendez says in his first interview since he toured Pelican Bay State Prison, “but not wearing my U.N. hat.”

The request came from the Center for Constitutional Rights (CCR) and was approved by California Judge Claudia Wilken. The visit will facilitate Mendez’s appearance as an expert witness in court for a class-action lawsuit, *Ashker v. Brown*, challenging prolonged solitary confinement as unconstitutional. Mendez’s report was submitted to the court on Friday.

During his tour of Pelican Bay State Prison, Mendez was allowed to traverse its multilevel pods virtually unencumbered. Flanked by an entourage of prison guards and administrators, his first request was to be taken to the cell of 37-year-old John Martinez, whom he found kneeling on the concrete floor.

Struggling to stand on wobbly legs, Martinez greeted Mendez with a huge smile. “My mom asked you to come see me?” he asked.

Martinez’s mom is Dolores Canales, co-founder of California Families Against Solitary Confinement (CFASC). She has been at the center of California’s struggle



Art by Michael Russell

to expose the abuse of solitary confinement since 2013, when the largest prison hunger strike in American history erupted across the state—which Martinez immediately joined.

A self-taught jailhouse lawyer, Martinez spends most of his day where Mendez found him, kneeling in front of an old-fashioned typewriter resting on the concrete block that also serves as his bed frame. His cell is windowless, 8 by 10 feet in diameter, and he’s only allowed out of it for an hour a day to exercise in a slightly larger, open-ceiling cell they call the “dog run.”

“I saw Johnny two weeks after Mendez’s visit,” Canales says, referring to the 15-hour drive she makes once a month for her three-hour no-contact visit with her son through thick plexiglass. “His face just lit up when he told me about it. That’s something I haven’t seen happen very often in the last 14 years.”

“A lot of journalists get in and just dismiss the whole thing,” Canales continues. “They see prisoners playing chess in their cells by calling the moves down the hall and think, ‘This can’t be that bad.’ They have no idea what they’re looking at, what solitary confinement actually does to a person. Mendez is different, he’s studied torture for decades—and he’s been there himself.”

Mendez endured torture as a political prisoner in Argentina in the 1970s, including periods in solitary confinement. He’s also seen conditions of isolation in countries around the globe. At Pelican Bay Mendez was allowed private, non-monitored visits with 11 of the named plaintiffs of *Ashker v. Brown*, each of which have spent between 10 and 29 years in isolation.

“Some have TV, books, a pen and paper,” Mendez says. “But clearly any mitigating factors are outweighed by the sheer duration. Isolation should be described in terms of days, maybe weeks...but never years or decades.”

Human rights groups estimate that as many as 80,000 people are kept in solitary confinement in U.S. prisons on any given day. This is far more, per capita, than any other country in the world. Yet the U.S. government continues to make statements to the contrary. Just last October a U.S. spokesperson stood in front of the UN Committee on Torture stating that “no systematic use of solitary confinement exists in the United States.”

“In judging other countries the State Department has regularly treated the use of prolonged solitary confinement as a violation,” says Rovner. “We like to see ourselves as an indispensable force for human rights. Yet solitary confinement conditions in this country are inconsistent with international standards.”

The State Department was contacted for comment on this story but failed to reply.

“When someone is covered with blood and has broken bones,” Mendez continues, “we don’t say, ‘Oh, that’s not torture, they’ll heal eventually.’ It’s the psychological aspect that we accept as cruelty.”

One of the plaintiffs, Fernando Bermudez, has spent the last 33 years of his life in solitary confinement. He was “validated” as a gang associate and is therefore serving an indefinite sentence in Pelican Bay’s SHU. Roughly a thousand others are in the same position. The majority did not commit a violent act to get there.

“For a legitimate reason, like attacking another inmate or a guard, short periods in isolation can be acceptable,” says Mendez. “But you can’t claim someone is part of a gang because they have a drawing that celebrates black or Mexican culture.”

“Somebody made a decision to put them in the SHU and to keep them there,” Mendez continues. “The only way for them to end their punishment is to debrief, which means telling on others. That’s textbook-definition coercion.”

“All of these factors combined amount to more than just cruel and unusual punishment,” concludes Mendez. “There’s no doubt in my mind this is torture.”

Canales is hopeful that Mendez’s findings, in conjunction with CCR’s lawsuit slated to begin in December 2015, at the very least will force change in California’s Department of Corrections’ policy.

“My son and 30 thousand others risked their lives on hunger strike so we could get to this point,” she says. “But we can’t work toward a solution until they admit there’s a problem.”

“These findings won’t be easy to brush off,” Canales continues. “That’s why the State Department hasn’t let Mendez in in the first place.”

“My mandate is not over and I haven’t given up,” Mendez says. “I’m still waiting to be listened to.” ●

<http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2015/03/16/the-u-s-won-t-let-the-u-n-look-at-prisons-to-investigate-solitary-confinement.html>

DOZENS OF MOTHERS STAGE HUNGER STRIKE AT IMMIGRANT DETENTION CENTER IN TEXAS

‘We want freedom for our children. It’s not right to continue to detain us.’

By Nadia Prupis, staff writer, 4-2-2015

About 40 women being held at the privately-run Karnes Family Detention Center in southern Texas launched a hunger strike this week to demand their release and the release of their families, vowing on Tuesday not to eat, work, or use the services at the facility until they are freed.

Nearly 80 women being held at the center, many of whom are said to be asylum seekers from Honduras, El Salvador, and Guatemala, signed a letter stating that they have all been refused bond despite having established a credible fear of violence if they are sent back to Central America—a key factor in the U.S. government’s process for screening detained immigrants to allow them amnesty.

“We deserve to be treated with some dignity and that our rights, to the immigration process, are respected,” the letter reads. “You should know that this is just the beginning and we will not stop [the hunger strike] until we achieve our goals. This strike will continue until each of us is freed.”

The letter also states that many of the children held in the camp are losing weight and that their “health is deteriorating.” Many of the families have been detained for as long as 10 months.

One woman, 26-year old Honduran mother Kenia Galeano, decried the center’s treatment of the families in a phone interview with McClatchy on Tuesday. “We’re many mothers, not just me,” she said. “We want freedom for our children. It’s not right to continue to detain us.”

Galeano, who shares a room with three other mothers and their children, also said that her two-year-old son has become depressed and lost weight due to the culturally inappropriate food.

According to the letter, some of the mothers were also left behind in the detention center, while their children were granted bond. “We have come to this country, with our children, seeking refugee status and we are being treated like delinquents,” the letter reads. “We are not delinquents nor do we pose any threat to this country.”

“This strike will continue until each of us is freed.”

Karnes, which is run by the private corrections company GEO Group, has come under fire in the past for its treatment of the children who are detained there, with reports of weight loss and forced separation from their mothers, but the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) department has denied those allegations.

ICE also claimed it was unaware of any residents actually participating in the strike, saying in a statement on Wednesday that the agency “fully respects the rights of all people to voice their opinion without interference, and all detainees, including those in family residential facilities such as Karnes, are permitted to do so.”

It also said it was investigating claims that members of a nonprofit advocacy group encouraged the women to take part in the hunger strike—a charge which activists deny.

Cristina Parker, immigration programs director at the Texas-based immigrant rights group Grassroots Leadership, told the Guardian on Tuesday, “This is something that has been rippling through the centre almost since it opened. I don’t believe at all that they were coached into doing this.”

According to Parker, the center is now blocking access to internet and telephone facilities for all of its detainees, regardless of whether they are participating in the hunger strike.

At least two women who signed the letter were also placed into isolation with their children in Karnes’s clinic, leading about half of those who initially pledged to take part in the hunger strike to drop out, according to the Refugee and Immigrant Center for Education and Legal Services.

Johana De Leon, a legal assistant with the nonprofit, told McClatchy that other mothers were warned they could lose custody of their children if they participated.

In addition to its mistreatment of children, Karnes has also been accused of sexual misconduct by guards and denial of critical medical care for detainees, among other charges. The Department of Homeland Security inspector general reported in February that there was no evidence to support the allegations. ●

WE CANNOT LIVE BY BREAD ALONE: TEXAS ABUSES PRISONERS WITH DENIED FOOD, BREAD AND WATER DIETS

By Kevin "Rashid" Johnson

Food is routinely used by US prison officials to summarily punish, torture, abuse and retaliate against prisoners. This happens with especial frequency in administrative segregation (solitary confinement) where prisoners are confined inside locked cells all day every day, and must have all meals delivered by guards. Under such circumstances we remain at guards' total mercy 'to eat or not to eat'.

In the segregation unit of the Texas prison — Clements Unit — where I am confined, guards frequently refuse (or "jack") prisoners' meals, especially mentally ill prisoners, starving them for days to weeks on end, and longer.

No Deterrence to Guards Abusing Food

"Jacking" meals occurs so regularly that most segregated Texas prisoners have been, or expect to be, at some point denied meals. And whether the victimized prisoner is 'respected' by his peers and guards afterward is determined by how he in turn reacts.

The *expected* reaction is for the 'jacked' prisoner to "run the team," that is, at the first opportunity, to act out in some manner that will require a team of five or more guards to dress out in full body riot armor and forcibly invade his cell and restrain, and more often than not, beat him. The process is formally called a "cell extraction" or "cell entry." The teams of guards who perform the cell extractions are suited up in body armor, gas masks, etc. exactly as police were seen dressed out in their militaristic occupation of Ferguson, Missouri to suppress public protest of the police murder of Michael Brown.

To "get his respect" the prisoner is expected to go through with the entire cell extraction process, which consists of his being sprayed multiple times with gas, and the team of guards then opening the cell door and rushing in, tackling and/or beating him to the floor, handcuffing him from behind and then beating him further as he is held down defenseless, which entails sly or open punches, kicks, choking, slamming his head against the concrete floor or steel fixtures inside the cell, gouging his eyes, squeezing his testicles, bending his fingers backs, etc. Often guards conceal small

weapons on their persons and use them to stab, cut or jab the prisoner.

The beatings are typically carried out under cover of a supervising ranking guard yelling repeatedly for the subdued prisoner to "stop resisting!" This is done for effect and to make it seem that the prisoner is being combative and the guards are struggling to control him.[1] This is a standard game which police also play as cover for beating, tasing, and also shooting people. It is such common practice with so-called 'law enforcement' officials, that I'm confident most every prisoner in Amerika who has witnessed or endured even a few cell extractions, and most civilians who've witnessed or suffered beatings at the hands of the police, will attest to it.

Most prisoners are intelligently unwilling to suffer the compounded abuse of 'running the team' on top of having been jacked for their meal. However, if the jacked prisoner *doesn't* run the team he becomes the target of ridicule by others as being a "bitch", "ho", etc. and is disparaged as weak, and is thus likely to be jacked yet again *and* ostracized to a greater or lesser degree. It is largely to avoid ridicule and attendant victimization that many prisoners are induced to run the team, and thereby save face. This is all a cultural reaction that officials have conditioned prisoners to adopt to our own disadvantage, which I'll explain.

Officials have taught prisoners over the years to resort to 'running teams' because, unless a prisoner employs uncommon tac-

tical ingenuity, he can almost *never* come out on top of such odds, even if he be in the best physical shape. And because guards enjoy a complete tactical advantage and almost invariably subdue the isolated prisoner quickly and suffer no injuries in the process, cell extractions bolster their sense of invulnerability, and embolden them to abuse us in the absence of fear of harm to themselves or other consequences. So by racking up repeated 'wins', the guards, while outnumbered by us at least ten-to-one, enjoy the highest morale; the overall segregated prisoner body, by resisting them in a manner that ensures and results in routine 'losses', is left demoralized and submissive to mistreatment. [2]

Because of the relative advantage that segregated confinement presents to guards, one finds that it is those most inclined to sadism and cowardly abuse that choose to work in segregation units and super-maximum security prisons. Moreover, even the courts have long admitted that poor salaries and training render guards "more vulnerable to the corrupting influence of unchecked authority than most people." [3]

Also, prisoners are conditioned to fear injuring guards in turn, under administrative threat of criminal prosecution if they do, which means an extended prison term, often an aggravated sentence, which might result in spending one's entire life in prison.

And in the final event, officials use instances of our running teams or responding to abuse with physical self-defense and deterrence to villainize us as being belligerent, assaultive, etc. painting a completely one-sided picture of events and making their own abusive violence appear only a measured and professional response to dangerous and out-of-control criminals, [4] rather than their acting under cover of absolute power to inflict compounded abuses on a completely disadvantaged, disempowered and isolated segment of the community.

Which brings me back to the issue of officials using their monopoly on our access to food as a form of abuse.

The Legality of Restricted Prison Diets

Texas prison officials subject prisoners to bread and water diets, even though by law and human necessity we cannot live



by bread alone. [5] Furthermore, the basis upon which restricted diets are imposed are also forbidden by law.

Prison officials may lawfully impose restricted diets on prisoners temporarily and only in response to, and to control, food-related misbehavior. Such restrictions may *not* be used as punishment. [6] And even still, restricted diets must provide adequate nutrition, which a bread and water diet does not.

But here is a recent example of the abusive impunity of prison officials, in this case the wholesale use of illegal bread and water food restrictions as arbitrary punishment, even when prisoners have done nothing wrong.

Bread and Water to Deter Prisoner Witnesses

I've had several articles published about abuses at this Clements Unit, which quote or reference prisoner witnesses who communicated their accounts to me via written notes which I have quoted from. Numerous Clements Unit officials have stated to me that they've read my critical articles online. In response, administrators have tried to discourage our passing notes between ourselves and have explicitly threatened witnesses.

On February 19, 2015, Michael Gruver, the Clements Unit major who oversees the prison's segregation unit, claimed to have been monitoring surveillance cameras mounted in the pod I'm housed in, and allegedly observed numerous prisoners passing items between cells.

In turn Gruver ordered a guard, Joshua Brandl, who was then leaving to go home—it was shift change—to write disciplinary charges on several prisoners. Gruver specifically directed Brandl to fabricate the charges to say fourteen prisoners had manipulated the locking mechanisms on the handcuff ports on their cell doors and opened them. Brandl wrote the charges.

Additionally, Gruver had each of the fourteen prisoners put on food restriction, although none were alleged to have committed any food-related misconduct. All fourteen prisoners remained on food restrictions for five days.

On food restriction a prisoner is given only a "food loaf" three times per day, delivered in a paper sack. At Clements Unit the food loaf is nothing but a greasy novel-sized block of corn bread with little else in it. The restricted prisoner must drink only water from the sink in his cell. Therefore,

food restriction at this unit is literally a bread and water diet.

Almost none of the fourteen food-restricted prisoners were able to eat the food loaf for more than a day, and most went the entire five days refusing to eat it at all because it is so unappetizing and wrecks havoc on one's digestive system.

Actually the "food loaf" recipe is *supposed* to contain a variety of ingredients from the regular menu, blended together and baked into a "loaf" which can be eaten without utensils, also an instant beverage is to accompany the loaf. This to "control" the misuse of food, utensils, etc., although this is not how loaf meals are prepared at Clements Unit. When complaints are made officials simply lie and claim the proper ingredients are included.

Several days after Brandl wrote the false disciplinary charges, he apparently returned to work with a heavy conscience and admitted he was concerned that several of the prisoners he lied on might retaliate against him. He came to our pod, at which point I called him to my cell door and asked why he'd fabricated reports on the others. All fourteen prisoners were served with the disciplinary charges written by Brandl on February 25. Brandl replied that Gruver ordered him to do it, but that he would tell the truth at the disciplinary hearings, that he'd in fact never observed the prisoners open the cuff ports on their cell doors but was told by Gruver to fabricate the reports saying he had.

Brandl honored his word and all the disciplinary charges were withdrawn before any hearings were conducted, but not before all fourteen prisoners were made to suffer a bread and water diet for five days, all as part of an administrative backlash and group punishment for prisoners bearing witness to witnessed and suffered abuse.

Meal Jacked as I Wrote Article

As an example of how regularly prisoners' meals are arbitrarily taken by guards, at the very time that I was writing this article, a guard, Abraham Dolleh, refused the prisoner housed in the cell directly across from me—Jeffrey Sylvan #1649281—his lunch meal, (this occurred on March 9, 2015).

Dolleh "jacked" Sylvan's lunch because as he was coming toward Sylvan's cell serving lunch, Dolleh called another prisoner several vulgar names. When he got to Sylvan's cell, Sylvan, thinking the guard was cursing him because Sylvan had been talking loudly to another prisoner, asked Dolleh who he was talking to. Dolleh re-

sponded by then cursing Sylvan and then refused to give him his lunch tray although Dolleh had already unlocked and opened the cuff port on Sylvan's cell door in preparation for serving him his meal.

When Dolleh vulgarly told Sylvan he wasn't going to give him his lunch and to back away from the cell door so he could lock the port back without any danger of Sylvan making physical contact with him, Sylvan then stuck his arm out the slot to prevent its being closed and demanded his meal.

In turn Dolleh took out his portable canister of OC gas and stated to Sylvan to move back or he'd say Sylvan was attempting to cut himself with a razor blade and would thereupon empty the canister of gas on him [7]. Sylvan then backed away from the door and Dolleh closed the port cursing Sylvan and refusing his lunch.

Conclusion

Today the entire world is bearing witness to an ongoing pattern of exposures of, and mass protests against, murders by American police of unarmed people of color and militaristic occupation and terrorism of our communities, which has gone on for decades. This sudden visibility has occurred *not* because the government nor mainstream media exposed it. It came about because members of the victimized communities exposed it themselves using social media outlets to make an end run around the government and press, who otherwise whitewashed, denied, and concealed these realities, often behind perpetuating racist criminal stereotypes against these communities.

Recall also that just prior to the police murder of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri this past summer and the militaristic police response to the community's righteous protests, which prompted this exposure, politicians and the media were loudly proclaiming that Amerika had finally risen above its racism and become a "post-racial society". The whole world now knows that was all a lie. But remember, we prisoners do not have access to video recording technologies not social media. So our suffering goes largely unknown to not just the world, but even our own communities.

This is why we must devise ways to expose the darkest recesses of Amerika's lawless law-enforcement system, namely its prisons. And it must be realized that the prisons and the tortures, brutalities and

abuses occurring within their hidden confines are an extension of and organically linked to the federal, state, and local police that are the very forces targeting the poor and people of color for selective mass imprisonment in Amerika.

*Dare to struggle. Dare to win!
All power to the people!*

ENDNOTES AND ADDITIONAL COMMENTS:

1. Medical staff and guards tend to downplay any injuries suffered by the prisoner and dismiss them as the result of the prisoner himself being combative and/or falling and striking a hard surface inside the cell during the cell extraction.
2. This culture which plays on male prisoners' masculine sensitivities works to the guards' benefit and the prisoners' disadvantage by inducing prisoners to 'fight' the guards from a position of pitting their weaknesses against the guards' strengths. I often point this out to my peers, and illustrate the point with a revelation I heard made by a US military commander during 2003, as he boasted to the media how easily US forces took Iraq's capitol city, Baghdad, during the illegal imperialist Iraq invasion that year. The officer told how US military intelligence forces had studied Iraqi culture and thereby developed a profile of its military-aged males. From this the US learned that Iraqi males (like most males in patriarchal societies) are highly sensitive about their masculinity. This was turned to the Iraqi's disadvantage. At first, the commander said, US attempts to enter Baghdad were quickly and soundly repelled by Iraqi defenders firing on them from concealed places and planting IEDs. Unless the hidden Iraqis could be induced to come out into the open and fight face-to-face, they would keep the advantage and the city could not be taken. So, what the US did was make gradual incursions into the city in armored formations with a megaphone on top of the tanks. From the megaphones they blared over and over in Arabic that only women hide from their opponents, and that "real men" meet and fight their opponents face-to-face. The commander laughingly recounted how in response to such taunts, the hidden fighters gave up their advantage and rushed out of buildings and other hiding places in droves harmlessly firing at the tanks and ar-

mored vehicles, only to be mowed down in turn by the vehicles' heavy machine guns. The city's defenders were thereby eliminated and the US and allied forces quickly took Baghdad.

3. *Landman v. Peyton*, 370 F. 2d 135, 140 (4th cir. 1966)
4. As I've demonstrated in numerous past articles on Amerika's abusive prisons, the guards and administrators are the ones who perpetuate all sorts of criminal acts in their abuses of prisoners, and indeed commit federal crimes every time they violate a prisoner's constitutional rights as their abuses described herein do. See 18 *United States Code*, Section 242. It is only, as with the murderous police in society they are afforded *de facto* immunity from prosecution by merit of being so-called law enforcement officers. The system protects and insulates its own.
5. A bread and water diet is unconstitutional. See, *Jenkins v. Werger*, 564 F. Supp. 806, 808-09 (1983); *Landman v. Royster*, 333 F Supp. 621, 647 (1971).
6. Food restrictions must be used only to control the behaviors for which they were designed. *LeMaire v. Maass*, 745 F. Supp. 623, 635-36 (1990), vacated and remanded on other grounds, 12 F. 3rd 1444, 1456 (1993).
7. I discuss the practice of guards at this unit using fabricated claims that prisoners have acted in self harm or suicide attempts, to speciously justify assaulting them with OC gas and taking all their property, usually against prisoners they dislike or who anger them. See Kevin



Art by Mark Makinson

"Rashid" Johnson. "Prison Assisted Suicide - The Texas Way." The full article can be read at rashidmod.com •

JUDGE RULES AGAINST CONS IN 'LITTLE GUANTANAMO' LAWSUIT

In late March a federal judge ruled against inmates who had challenged highly restrictive federal prison units, dealing a severe blow to their five-year attempt to close what are sometimes called Little Guantamos.

For years, advocates have complained about the special prison wings set up in the wake of 9/11 called "communication management units." The units restrict prisoners' links to the outside world, severely limiting phone time and barring contact with visitors.

At first, most prisoners in the special wings were Muslims. Today, the inmates are more diverse.

In her opinion for the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia, Judge Barbara Rothstein wrote that the Bureau of Prisons' units do not violate inmates' rights because the additional restrictions are "limited in nature" compared to ordinary prison units, and are far better than solitary confinement. She granted the government's motion for summary judgment in the case.

"In short, except where communication is concerned, (communication management units) function like a general population unit," Rothstein said.

Former prisoners like Daniel McGowan disagree. Sentenced to seven years for arson as a result of his actions with the Earth Liberation Front, McGowan was one of the few non-Muslim prisoners placed in the units.

For McGowan, the difference between a regular federal prison and one of the CMUs was like night and day. The CMU left him feeling isolated and placed a deep strain on his marriage. He was originally a plaintiff in the lawsuit, but he was dismissed from the case after he was released from prison.

Rothstein's ruling "ignores the reality of what these prisoners are living through," said Rachel Meeropol, an attorney at the Center for Constitutional Rights who argued for the prisoners.

“We know that maintaining contact with one’s family and one’s loved ones is the single most important aspect of rehabilitation,” she said.

The plaintiffs’ lawyers had argued that while federal prisoners typically spend only about a week in solitary confinement, stints in the CMUs can last years. Unlike prisoners in solitary confinement, CMU prisoners are allowed to leave their cells. But their phone calls to the outside world are limited and heavily monitored.

The lawyers also alleged that the government used arbitrary and faulty procedures to place prisoners in the special units, although Rothstein did not address that claim.

Meeropol said the plaintiffs will decide soon whether to appeal the decision. “We’ll be considering all of our options,” she said.

In the meantime, she said she is heartened at least that the Bureau of Prisons has loosened some of the restrictions since their lawsuit was filed in 2010.

“Just the light that litigation has shown on the unit has resulted in some significant changes that we’re proud of, even though we’re experiencing this current setback,” she said. “Prisoners are now moved out of the unit regularly. A normal stay is probably a year and a half, compared to prisoners who spent four or five years there.”

Whatever the fate of the larger litigation against the special units, McGowan is still pursuing his own separate claim against the federal prison system. After McGowan wrote a blog entry for The Huffington Post in 2013 about the conditions in the CMUs, federal marshals picked him up from a halfway house and threw him in jail.

Only after the frantic efforts of his lawyers was McGowan released. His lawsuit over retaliation, filed in September, continues. •

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2015/03/16/prisoners-little-guantanamo_n_6881774.html

SF JAIL INMATES FORCED TO FIGHT, PUBLIC DEFENDER SAYS

By Vivian Ho, Mar 26, 2015

San Francisco sheriff’s deputies arranged and gambled on battles between County Jail inmates, forcing one to train for the fights and telling them

to lie if they needed medical attention, the city’s public defender said Thursday.

Since the beginning of March, at least four deputies at County Jail No. 4 at 850 Bryant St. threatened inmates with violence or withheld food if they did not fight each other, gladiator-style, for the entertainment of the deputies, Public Defender Jeff Adachi said.

Adachi said the ringleader in these fights was Deputy Scott Neu, who was accused in 2006 of forcing inmates to perform sexual acts on him. That case was settled out of court.

“I don’t know why he does it, but I just feel like he gets a kick out of it because I just see the look on his face,” said Ricardo Palikiko Garcia, one of the inmates who said he was forced to fight. “It looks like it brings him joy by doing this, while we’re suffering by what he’s doing.”

An attorney for the San Francisco Deputy Sheriff’s Association, the union representing the deputies, called the allegations “exaggerated,” and said the fighting was “little more than horseplay.”

But in a recorded conversation with Adachi, Garcia described a predatory atmosphere of fear and retribution in which deputies would knock over his tray and force him to gamble for his food.

Garcia, who is in custody on drug and gun possession charges, said that earlier this month he was twice forced to fight another inmate, Stanley Harris, to the point where his ribs may have been fractured and he could not sleep on his side because of the pain.

Adachi said the four deputies involved were Neu, Eugene Jones, Clifford Chiba and Evan Staehely. All four have been placed on paid administrative leave.

“They took me down to the hallway and told me to fight another inmate, which was Stanley, and told me if I didn’t fight that I would basically get beat up by themselves, by Deputy Neu,” Garcia said. “And he told me he was going to Mace me and cuff me if I didn’t.”

‘Anything goes’

Neu told Garcia and Harris that if they required medical attention, they were to lie and say they fell off a bunk, Garcia said.

“And he told me anything goes,” he said. “Just don’t punch the face, so no one can basically see the marks. But anything goes, other than the face.”

Garcia said that at 5 feet 9 and 150 pounds, he was the smallest man in the pod while Harris, at 6 feet and 350 pounds, was

the biggest.

During the first fight, which took place in a part of a hallway that was blocked from view, Neu appeared to have been betting on Harris, Garcia said, who tapped out after the smaller man got him in a headlock.

“Deputy Neu told Stanley he would be coming on Saturday, the following day, to take him to work out and to basically train him,” Garcia said. “And he also told everyone that was there that there will be a round two and he does not like to lose money.”

Rape threat alleged

Harris, in another recorded conversation with Adachi, said Neu once made him do 200 push-ups within an hour as part of “training.” As he did his push-ups, Neu threatened to anally rape him, telling him “he’ll take my cheeks,” Harris said.

During other sessions of forced exercise, Neu also told him “he wanted to go a round with me,” taking off his belt and shirt to try and fight with Harris.

“This is sadistic behavior,” Adachi said. “This is something that goes beyond any sense of common decency.”

The public defender’s office hired a private investigator to look into the claims after learning of the allegations this month and the attorneys were going to wait until their clients were safe and out of the jail before they came forward with the allegations. But they received word that another fight was planned for next week, Adachi said.

In a report compiled by private investigator Barry Simon, Harris and Garcia said the deputies — Neu in particular — threatened to take them off their kitchen jobs or send them to a jail where more dangerous inmates were housed.

Witness to gambling

Another inmate, Jonathan Christopher, witnessed one of the fights between Harris and Garcia. He said Neu had a habit of making inmates gamble against him for their basic benefits of food and clean laundry. He carried red dice and a deck of cards with him for this reason, but even if they won, he would sometimes take their items anyway, giving them to other inmates as payoffs.

Harris said Neu had a tattoo on his right arm and lower leg reading, “850 Mob,” possibly in connection to the jail’s location at 850 Bryant St.

Harry Stern, an attorney for the deputies union, slammed what he called Adachi’s “cursory sham investigation.”

“The hypocrisy of Adachi engaging in

trial by one-sided press conference cannot go unchallenged: He has done a cursory sham investigation by interviewing a few inmates over a scant two days rather than having the decency to request a serious impartial investigation,” Stern said in a statement. “It is unfortunate that Mr. Adachi didn’t initiate a formal complaint that would have been investigated thoroughly by the appropriate agencies. The investigators would have had the opportunity to interview witnesses, including the accused deputies, and look for physical evidence.”

Some inmates working with Adachi have exaggerated a rather benign situation, Stern said.

“A deputy may have encouraged one inmate to work out. The deputy may have also allowed two inmates to wrestle in order to settle a dispute about who was stronger,” he added. “The ‘wrestling’ was essentially little more than horseplay. There was no betting. The inmates were never forced to work out. They were never forced to fight.”

A permissive culture

The fight allegations came to light after Garcia’s father asked his son’s attorney to help. Deputy Public Defender Scott Grant spoke to his client and learned Garcia had been forced to fight another inmate, who

also was represented by the public defender’s office, Adachi said.

Matt Gonzalez, the public defender’s chief attorney, said the reported abuse indicates that there is a deeper, ongoing problem within the Sheriff’s Department.

“These acts cannot occur without the implicit acceptance of otherwise law-abiding deputies,” Gonzalez said. “It is impossible for just two or three or even four deputies to commandeer the jail and stage fights without other deputies being aware of it.”

Sheriff Ross Mirkarimi, who was at Adachi’s news conference, said he was “extremely disturbed” when Adachi called him about the allegations Thursday morning. The department’s internal affairs unit has begun an investigation and the sheriff is asking the U.S. Department of Justice to conduct an independent investigation into the allegations.

He echoed Gonzalez’s concerns about a culture problem in his department. “I do not accept any kind of culture within our county jail system that would resort to such barbaric or unlawful activity as these deputies have demonstrated,” he said.

Though Harris and Garcia told Adachi they wanted to stay where they were so they could work in the kitchen, Mirkarimi

said they had been transferred to another San Francisco jail “for their protection.”

Meanwhile, Police Chief Greg Suhr said he received the report from Adachi and that his department will be investigating to see if there is any criminal wrongdoing.

The allegations “are egregious enough that I forwarded them on (to the special investigations division),” he said.

District Attorney George Gascón called the allegations “deplorable.”

“Common sense indicates that such conduct does not occur without the knowledge of numerous people,” he said in a statement. “These allegations require an independent and thorough investigation into the practices and supervision of the San Francisco Sheriff’s Department.”

‘Sick, sick conduct’

The sexual assault lawsuits against Neu were settled out of court, said Adante Pointer, the attorney who represented a female inmate in that case. In addition to the woman, Neu was accused of forcing two transgender inmates to perform sexual acts on him.

“It was sick, sick conduct,” Pointer said. “I am surprised he was even still in the position to be with inmates unsupervised.” ●

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