

The Abolitionist

ISSUE # 10

A CRITICAL RESISTANCE PUBLICATION

FALL 2008

*Celebrating Our 10 Year Anniversary
Free To People In Prisons, Jails, And Detention Centers
Español Al Revés*

Dear Reader,

We hope that this paper finds you in the best possible spirits and health.

As you may have noticed, issue 10 is coming out a little earlier than our average quarterly print schedule, so that it would be available in time for Critical Resistance 10 (CR10), our 10th anniversary strategy conference.

Ten years ago, thousands of people came together in Berkeley, California to theorize and strategize a vision for prison industrial complex (PIC) abolition. Veterans of various liberation struggles who hadn't seen each other in years were able to learn from each other's experiences and histories, and lay the groundwork for a movement to abolish the PIC. One of the major accomplishments of this conference was the founding of Critical Resistance.

This issue of The Abolitionist is in large part dedicated to CR10, which is taking place in Oakland, California from September 26-28, 2008. Over the last 10 years, Critical Resistance has built a member-led and member-run grassroots movement that focuses on the strategies of decarceration, stopping prison expansion, and supporting alternative practices that create lasting safety and self-determination in our communities. In all our work, we organize to build power and to stop the devastation that the reliance on prisons and policing has brought to our families, our communities, and ourselves.

This edition focuses on some of the biggest challenges we face as a movement: US-led imperialist wars and their relationship to the PIC, corporate economic development, the repression and criminalization of immigrants, people of color, young people, and queer communities, California Propositions 6 and 9, and the widespread use of sensory deprivation units and supermax prisons.

Several articles in this edition examine the far-reaching effects of isolation. From the use of gang injunctions and security threat management units against young people to the segregation of political prisoners, isolation is a key strategy in the repression of organization and resistance. These tactics flippantly violate international human rights treaties and have been codified in federal and state law and prison administrative processes.

Many articles center the importance of community in fighting back and maintaining sanity. The STOPMAX Conference in Philadelphia brought together many of those most impacted by these policies to launch a campaign to abolish the use of isolation and associated forms of torture. Robert King Wilkerson, Ralph Hamm, Ray Levasseur and Laura Whitehorn testify to the enduring resilience of the human spirit and how connection to family, friends, and comrades helped them resist the physical, psychological, and spiritual violence of solitary confinement.

We also face internal contradictions between the visions of liberation we aspire to and the

persistent, complex oppressions that we replicate in our own organization and movement. White supremacy, patriarchy, and capitalism aren't simply structural oppressions that affect us all equally. They get enforced and internalized differently according to our material conditions, relations to power, life experiences, chosen, inherited, and policed identities, land bases, and histories. All too often these oppressions and privileges get reproduced in our very efforts to resist the prison industrial complex and create alternatives.

This part of the struggle – building a diverse community of resistance that meaningfully engages difference and empowers those most impacted and targeted by the PIC while encouraging all people to participate fully and take risks together – is integral to real social change. Alisa Bierra calls this type of meaningful practice a “critically integrated politic,” which “challenges assumptions made by movement participants, and often transforms political practices and analyses, making the work more dynamic, creative, contextual, and strategic.”

In this edition you also learn how the organizing of the New Jersey 4 intersects with the legacies of Aimée Césaire and Qwusu Yaki Yaku-ba's struggles against male supremacy as part of a larger liberation and cultural struggle for self-determination and independence, how a group of diverse men in the maximum security Walpole Prison took on racial polarization to form a union. David Gilbert's article challenges us to understand the global and national connection between imperialism and the PIC: opening up important strategic questions we will pursue in future issues. Perspectives On Critical Resistance traces the evolution of Critical Resistance over the last 10 years through the experiences of our members, many of who were organizers and participants of the first conference. And much, much more...

For the next issue, we'd like to focus on the theme of victory. Please try to tailor your submissions to deal with this theme. Here are some questions to get you thinking:

What will it take to win prison industrial complex abolition? What are some victories, big and small from your life, inside prison walls and outside, from the history of this movement?

What could a meaningful victory look like? Tell us about a strategy you found successful. Have you experienced/heard about any “false” victories, which seem like a positive step but might actually be something we'll have to fight against down the road?

With this little primer, we bring you the 10th edition of the Abolitionist. Please write to us and let us know what you think, or how you think that we can im-

prove. If you would like to submit to the Abolitionist, please take note of the changes in our Submission Guidelines at the end of the paper. Also, as always, we are seeking the financial support to continue distributing the Abolitionist free of charge to people who are imprisoned. Please encourage your friends and family to get a paid subscription to the Abolitionist! **Thank you for reading, and please take care of yourself and each other.**

**In struggle and solidarity,
Ritika Aggarwal and Michael Callahan
Issue Editors, Abolitionist #10**

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THE ABOLITIONIST

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A UNION FOR ABOLITION

BY MICHAEL CALLAHAN

Editor's Note:

This is the first installment of a series examining the recently released book, *When the Prisoners Ran Walpole*. The purpose of these articles is to glean lessons from the Walpole Prison experiment and generate discussion and strategies for future efforts that we can all get behind. What follows is an article exploring the major themes, people, and events of the book to enhance our appreciation and awareness of important abolitionist history. It provides some context in which to understand the project and will bring us up through the state police take back. The two main sources for this article are the book and a written correspondence from Ralph Hamm post-marked June 2, 2008. All quotes are from the book except those italicized, which signify that they were taken from Ralph's letter.

The second installment will struggle with legacy and the big question, "So, now what?"

Part three will be a montage taken from your responses to the first two pieces, so write us with your ideas! Write to: Walpole Response, c/o The Abolitionist, Critical Resistance, 1904 Franklin St., Suite 504, Oakland, CA 94612.

Special thanks to Jamie Bissonnette, Ralph Hamm, Asha Tall, Kumasi, Rachel Herzing, Reverend Ed Rodman, and Bobby Dellelo for making this series possible, and inspiring its best parts.

When the Prisoners Ran Walpole is about ordinary people – prisoners, their families, advocates, clergy, politicians, legislators, prison administrators, lawyers, judges, and labor organizers – who worked together across substantial differences for a "vital solution to crime and punishment."

It is a must-read for anyone serious about making prisons obsolete. What makes the book so important is its detailed description and analysis of dynamic events, relationships, political and economic formations, and social upheaval.

Thirty-six years ago a group of men at a maximum-security prison in Massachusetts (MCI Walpole) took destiny into their own hands. Instead of becoming history, they made it. They declared their tenuous sovereignty as workers in the face of a prison system bent on protecting its dominium. This timely book exhumes a buried history. It's a tale of two fuses racing in opposite directions. One's function was to level the prison; the other's was to raze the movement. In the explosion's aftermath, a courageous author has wiped off the dust and put her finger on the pulse of living history.

Author and long-time organizer Jamie Bissonnette – with Ralph Hamm, Robert Dellelo, and Edward Rodman – offer us a study on how prisoners in Walpole Prison, then the most violent penitentiary in the country, overcame colossal obstacles and divisions to form a union: the National Prisoners Reform Association (NPR), which became the lodestone for one of the most radical prison abolition projects in US history.

"The NPR defined prisoners as workers. Using a labor-organizing model, the NPR intended to form chapters in prisons throughout the country. The goal of the association was to organize prisoners into labor unions or collective-bargaining units. Prisoners' unions could then act as a counterbalance to the notoriously powerful guards' unions in negotiations with prison authorities about how the prisons were run. Prisoners throughout the country began to look at prisoners' unions as a catalyst for prison reform. But only at MCI Walpole did the NPR become a recognized bargaining unit, democratically elected by the prisoners – the workers – to lead their struggle for reform within the prisons," recounts Bissonnette.

In the 18 short months between January 1972 and July 1973, the prisoner population at Walpole was cut by 15 percent and recidivism plummeted from 60 to 23 percent. These numbers hint at the explosive truth: prisons are unreformable, not people.

Context for Conflict

Perhaps the best-known prison uprising in the US, the Attica Prison rebellion was an watershed event in the prisoner rights movement. It alarmed administrators, politicians, and legislators; and lit a fire under prisoners

and their supporters. The images from Attica of blindfolded guards dressed in prison clothing and the prisoners' strong, eloquent public statements left an indelible mark on the public's conscience.

Attica would end in bloodshed and a contested legacy. The prisoners from Cellblock D demonstrated they could effectively organize themselves. The state demonstrated it could ruthlessly quash a rebellion and set the terms for future negotiations. As proof, twenty-six prisoners and nine hostages lay dead.

In the early 1970s, the US prison system was in crisis. Prisoners, community organizers,

by the National Guard" as heralds of change.

These events politicized the prisoners. In turn, the prison culture underwent profound shifts. "The prisoners slowly began to see themselves as one class, with one cause, serving one purpose. We had linked our collective consciousness upon the commonality of the oppressed class," Hamm explains.

These shifts in consciousness and priorities set up a showdown between the emerging leadership and the existing structure of white prisoners that ruled the prison. Vincent "the Bear" Flemmi headed up the white hard core. They ran all the prison's enterprises in collusion with the guards in a mutually beneficial arrangement. They turned a buck, controlled the blocks, and relieved the guards of their more unpleasant custodial duties.

Robert Dellelo saw this racial patronage as an obstacle to prisoner unity. The situation came to a head one day in the yard. "The Bear tried to make a power play against me in the yard in front of everyone. He came up to me when I was standing and drinking a can of soda and he sucker-punched me...I was a tough kid and not afraid to fight...I had survived the Training School. I beat the Bear up in the yard. People were suing for peace. They were afraid of what might have happened," recounts Dellelo.

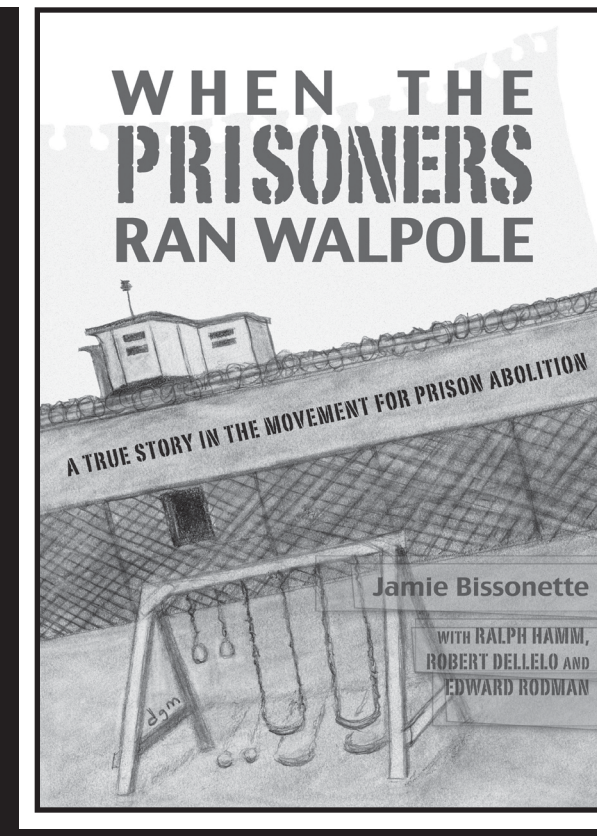
After the fight, the administration shipped Dellelo out to a federal prison in Marion, Illinois, but the ferment continued. According to Bissonnette, "By November 1971, the population of MCI Walpole was in open rebellion. In the beginning of the month, prisoners set a fire at the foundry resulting in \$30,000 in damages. Shortly after the fire, in a display of unity, the entire prison population staged a work stoppage." The prisoners hit upon their cornerstone strategy: non-cooperation.

Following the unrest, prisoners were locked down and their cells were searched for weapons. The prison administration held a press conference during which guards displayed pipes, shanks, and a pipe bomb. The media, however, never picked up on the fact that this was the same display the guards dragged out after every episode of resistance.

The prisoners threatened the administration with more trouble if they didn't return Dellelo from Marion. They elected him chairman of the Inmate Advisory Council (IAC) in absentia. He was transferred back and accepted his post on the condition he could dissolve the council if the administration tried to use it as tool of cooptation again. Dellelo and Hamm set to work building unity in their spheres of influence.

According to Bissonnette, "Where Hamm had used Black Consciousness to build unity within the small Black population; Dellelo used the 'street code' of the institution to balance the interests of powerful associations

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Cover Art by Darrell Gane-McCalla

and reform-minded officials were tired of the dog and pony shows resulting in empty promises for reform that had become the standard practice among prison officials. The interested parties saw the problems and solutions from very different vantage points, but it was clear that the volatile prison conditions required drastic measures. Attica drove the point home.

The prisoners at Walpole were nobody's fools. Most were lifers and long-termers. They recognized the tragically patent cycle of abuse, scandal, reports, new laws, and broken promises. The prisoners knew the prison ran only with their compliance. They mopped the floors, cleaned the heads, cooked the food, baked the bread, ran the printing press, and stamped the license plates. They understood that the class of people known as prisoners had few rights on paper, and still fewer in practice.

Ralph Hamm recalls, "The Attica prison revolt, the American Indian Movement takeover at Wounded Knee, the political rise of the Republic of New Africa [sic], the formation of the Weather Underground, and the slaughter of students at Kent State University

among the white prisoners. According to Hamm, "their differing styles helped achieve the unity they needed to move forward."

Both Hamm and Dellelo knew the limits of the "street code" in building a viable organization. It was necessary to break up the old order, keep reactionary prisoners in line, and buy some time to build the NPRA, but eventually this type of control turns on itself, as illustrated by the face-off between Dellelo and Flemmi. Hamm and Dellelo's personal relationship offered an alternative model of trans-racial solidarity based on fellowship, common interests, and a shared vision for the future.

During the summer of 1972, Dellelo was busy building the NPRA. Black African Nation Toward Unity (BANTU) and the Black prisoner population were still wary of the all-white organization, and labor's historical exclusion of Black workers. Supporters such as Ed Rodman pressed Hamm to get involved from the beginning so that Black and Latino prisoners had equal claim over the NPRA's structure and

program. Rodman impressed upon Hamm that the NPRA was, "the most viable vehicle for prisoner self-determination."

FORGING RACIAL SOLIDARITY

When the Prisoners Ran Walpole raises interesting questions about the role of race and carceral status in building an abolitionist movement. The book demonstrates how prisoners living in close proximity to death as slaves under the Thirteenth Amendment transgress race.

As Bissonnette notes, "The unity was hard to achieve, given the utter racial polarization of the prison population. The commitment to racial equity that allowed the development of unity began as a personal commitment between Ralph Hamm and Bobby Dellelo." Dellelo, a white man who had spent most of his life in prisons, understood what Hamm was up against. According to Hamm, "Between Bobby and me, it was never about race. It was about coming together as two equal men." Dellelo, on the other hand also benefitted from his relationship with Hamm. Their friendship gave him access to the knowledge that white prisoners' would never truly achieve power or dignity without also working for racial equity.

"To be successful, not only would prison organizing need to cross racial lines, but also white prisoners would have to understand that being in prison made them 'Black.' Hamm says. "Bobby got this. In a sense he became Black. He

was not going to go forward without us." Or in Dellelo's words, "If we continued with racism, we would have been dead, dead in the water."

Prison policies play ethnic groups against each other through classification and block segregation. At Walpole, the fact that white prisoners and Black prisoners affiliated with the Nation of Islam got job placement and program privileges compounded this division. Some of the prisoners at Walpole recognized this connection and developed an analysis and practice to educate white and Black prisoners. Hamm

elaborates, "One of the greatest lessons a prisoner must accept and digest is that the Thirteenth Amendment to the US Constitution abolished chattel slavery from the private sector only to sanction it in the prisons of this country. We are all slaves! We are utilized as commodities in this country's service-related economy!"

When Ralph Hamm and Bobby Dellelo were transferred back to Walpole an extraordinary conceptual shift began that would



Photo by Lois Dellelo

alter the makeup of the NPRA. Out of the roughly 465 prisoners at Walpole, 48 were Black, 2 were Latino, and 1 was Asian, although the population of people of color was continually outpacing the white population among prisoners. To their credit, Dellelo and others saw that a new identity and organization was required to unify the prisoners.

Influenced by BANTU, a Black Consciousness prisoner group at Walpole, a new leadership linked their imprisonment to the institution of slavery and then opposed this inhuman designation by proclaiming their sovereignty as workers under the aegis of "Blue Unity."

"They had learned that prisoners, given resources and preparation, understood that, despite the very real racial, class, and organized-crime distinctions, they were all in their situation together. Prisoners innately knew they had one choice: they could be 'pigs' or they could be 'men.' Given the opportunity, they believed prisoners would choose to be men," explains Bissonnette.

The new leadership knew that to transform from a group of individuals to a unified body acting in a democratic, collective interest required the general population to elevate their consciousness and commitment to unity.

Hamm recalls, "We were all raised under

"[Prisons] are wrong in concept and wrong in application; they are human abominations, manifesting corrupt policies and politics. Prisons are unreformable monster factories and when we attempt to 'reform' them, it is always an exercise in futility; there is no way to make sense out of insanity." Robert Dellelo

the rote system of education, and it was somewhat instrumental in the development of both BANTU and NPRA activities and growth. However, we found the need to experiment and came to rely more upon the concepts of education developed by Paolo Friere. With Friere as our mentor, we came to believe that the person who fills up with another's contents (rote-style education), in contradiction to his 'being' in the world, could not truly learn because he was not challenged. Our committees and activities, therefore, were designed to challenge our members to be creative,

self-reliant, and to act as subjects in history, as opposed to just being a manipulated 'thing.'"

"...We brought to the NPRA, and to the consciousness of the collective prisoner population, the belief that anything was possible - we had only to sacrifice and commit to our futures for the common good, as did our African ancestors. Our newly awakened consciousness afforded us the ability to demonstrate to the leadership of the various ethnic groups in the prison that we were ALL slaves."

NEW LEADERSHIP

Packard Manse, a predominately white interfaith group dedicated to nonviolent social change, played a large role in opening the doors of Walpole Prison to the world outside. Packard Manse helped develop the Ad Hoc Committee on Prison Reform (AHC) and, later, the Observer Program. On November 22, 1971, Packard Manse sent a telegram to Massachusetts' governor, Francis Sargent, requesting a meeting to discuss the explosive situation inside the Department of Corrections (DOC). It was

signed by 108 religious, labor, legal, academic, and community leaders and bolstered by 600 postcards sent in from across the commonwealth.

The telegram was both politically astute and emblematic of the measured approach community advocates took to maneuver complex governmental, labor, and community power relations. They knew that they had to be impartial to gain access to the prisons. As taxpayers and concerned citizens, they claimed a democratic right and responsibility to monitor a public institution. The telegram balanced the needs of prisoners and guards in prison reform under the rubric of safety and that everyone had a role to play.

The group eventually won a meeting with Sargent and secured two promises: 1) that he would visit the prisons himself to evaluate the situation; and 2) that he would assemble legislation to mandate changes to the prison system. Sargent followed through. The upshot was a "six-point prison-reform program" and a new commissioner of corrections who would implement it, John O. Boone.

As a boy in Georgia, John Boone experienced chain gangs and white racist terror firsthand. Lynching was common in his town. His uncle was sentenced to hard labor for possession of a firearm, a self-defense necessity. He

accompanied his father on visits to deliver food and solace. "Many of them perished from malnutrition, exposure, dehydration, overwork, and untreated

illness... Boone remembers the loneliness of the laborers, the way they were chained together, the songs they sang," writes Bissonnette. These memories were emblazoned in his worldview.

After serving in WW II he studied social work at Morehouse, where he came under the wing of Dr. Martin Luther King's mentor, Benjamin Elijah Mays. Boone went on to get a Master's degree at Clark College. Upon graduation he worked his way up the ladder in the Federal

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STOPMAX CONFERENCE

BY MALCOLM GOSSETT

Editor's note: Critical Resistance member Malcolm Gossett attended the STOPMAX Conference this past June. What follows is his report...

History and Political Uses

Solitary confinement was first instituted at the Eastern State Penitentiary in 1829, in Philadelphia. Beginning in the 1970s and 1980s, solitary confinement was used as an instrument of

port organization dedicated to providing services to low/no income trans and gender non-conforming people of color, has documented the extreme levels of transphobic and trans-misogynistic vio-

and that it was “the connection to people on the outside that helped to achieve hope.” King also highlighted the fact that supermax prisons are manifestations of the PIC and to effectively stop solitary confinement, “we have to abolish prisons themselves.” King envisions the abolition of supermax prisons as an essential step toward the ultimate abolition of the prison industrial complex.

Ray Levasseur, former member of the United Freedom Front, author, and self-described “survivor of the wars fought for and against American imperialism,” spent twenty years in solitary confinement. Levasseur emphasized that enduring solitary confinement was “not just about survival, but surviving with your humanity intact.” Levasseur stressed resiliency in the face of severe harm and grave injustice. Another activist, Arch Angel of the Latin Kings, spoke about inherited activism and how he became politicized reading books by elder activists like Levasseur. Arch Angel also talked about the current violence directed at youth and the growing use of “security threat management units.” These modified versions of older solitary confinement designs isolate youth and use the “gang label” to legitimize this type of repression.

Strategy and Future Campaign Work

The closing of the conference marked one of the most important sessions. Everyone who attended the STOPMAX conference—former prisoners, family members with loved ones inside, organizers, and educators—broke out into small regional groups and had strategic planning meetings so that the energy built up during the conference could continue at a regional level.

The work to abolish solitary confinement is intimately connected to Critical Resistance’s mission of abolishing the PIC in its entirety. By stopping the use of solitary confinement, the abolitionist movement is emboldened and strengthened. As James Baldwin wrote in his 1970 open letter to then imprisoned Angela Davis, “If we know, then we must fight for your life as though it were our own... For if they take you in the morning, they will be coming for us that night.”



Danza Mexica Cuauhtemoc . Photo by Terry Foss

political repression. “Seg is full of political prisoners,” remarks Bilal Sunni Ali, the attorney for Jamil Al Amin (formerly H. Rap Brown). “Political internment is just one aspect of the war against us.” Speaking at the “Survivors of Isolation” panel, Ali identified the primary purpose of control units: to stop people inside from organizing.

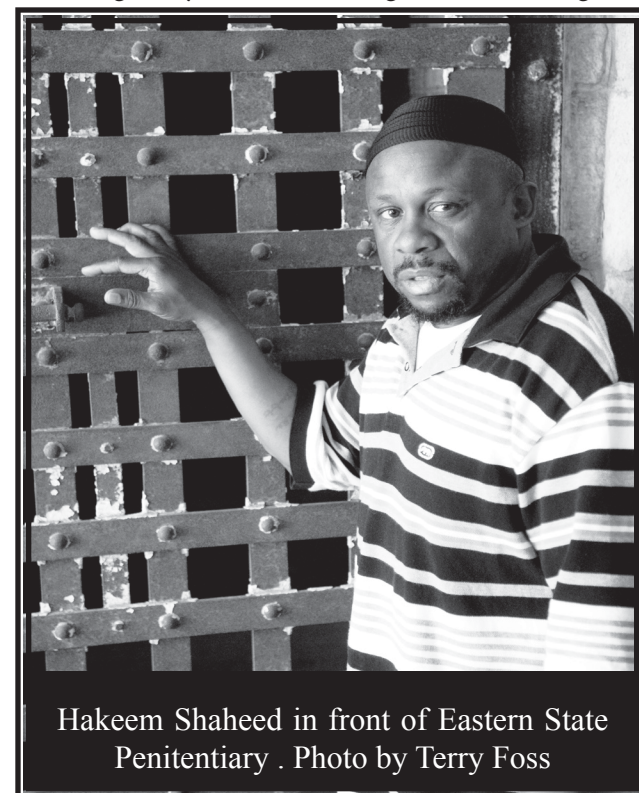
Laura Whitehorn, a former political prisoner and member of the Weather Underground, spoke at the closing dinner. She emphasized, “Once you’re in prison it doesn’t matter what your offenses are—you’re in there and you’re in solidarity!” Incarcerated because of her radical work on the outside as a member of the Weathermen, Whitehorn was placed in solitary confinement, yet continued to organize and teach HIV/AIDS education and writing.

lence that is perpetuated inside men’s jails in New York City in their 2005 report, “It’s a War In Here.”

Solidarity and Strategies

While solitary confinement represents a programmatic attempt to quell movements of solidarity and organizing among incarcerated peoples, it often fails because of the ingenious and creative ways that people inside navigate the oppressive system. One example of group solidarity and collective subversion of the system is the protest by non-trans men at a Los Angeles ICE detention center to get treatment for Victoria Arellano, a Mexican trans woman. People inside protested the fact that Arellano was being denied HIV/AIDS medication. They brought her cold cloths to break her fever, carried her when she was unable to walk, and decided to bring full attention to this murderous neglect. Eighty men refused to line up and unanimously screamed out “Hospital!” so that she could get medical attention. They also circulated a petition on her behalf. She eventually received medical attention because of this effort, although it was too late. In solidarity, they raised \$245 to help her family with funeral expenses. This type of organizing challenges the system from within and illustrates the power that people inside have, despite the brutal conditions imposed.

Many formerly imprisoned activists spoke about the strategies they developed to survive violence and the relationships that gave them hope. For Robert King Wilkerson, a former Black Panther and presently the only free member of the Angola 3, that hope came from people on the outside organizing for political prisoners and to abolish the prison industrial complex (PIC). King talked about how being inside Angola felt like “you were basically there for life”



Hakeem Shaheed in front of Eastern State Penitentiary . Photo by Terry Foss

“If we know, then we must fight for your life as though it were our own... For if they take you in the morning, they will be coming for us that night.”

From James Baldwin’s 1970 open letter to then imprisoned Angela Davis

Resistance to Gender Responsive Isolation

Solitary confinement is used as part of another harmful program of the prison industrial complex: gender-responsive imprisonment. Trans people in prison are often placed in segregated units according to their biologically and/or physically assigned sex. For trans people in solitary, the threat of physical and sexual abuse is combined with the psychic violence of mental torture.

The Sylvia Rivera Law Project, a legal sup-

The New Jersey 4

The STOPMAX Campaign, sponsored by the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC), works to eliminate the use of isolation and segregation in U.S. prisons.

Our Strategies

Our strategies include research, grassroots organizing, public education and policy advocacy to abolish solitary confinement and / or reduce its use.

Phase One

The first phase of the STOPMAX campaign is focused on determining the extent of the use of isolation in a cross-section of correctional facilities: various state Departments of Corrections, the state Departments of Juvenile Corrections, and immigration detention centers. In selected states, we are surveying how many people are living in isolation conditions, who those people are, what conditions they are living in, how they came to be placed there, and whether and how it is possible to exit those units. This research process will result in publication of regional reports. Both AFSC Arizona and California STOPMAX have already published theirs (see resource section for report links).

Phase I of the campaign culminated with a national organizing Conference on May 30-June 1, 2008 at Temple University in Philadelphia, PA, where 400 people from across the country participated, 250 of those being families and former prisoners.

A National Steering Committee has been formed and regional groups are beginning to meet to set plans for work in their areas. One of the next priorities is to form a Tribunal sub-committee to develop a series of hearings around the country.

Phase Two

By compiling an accurate assessment of the current practices and conditions, we will have the basis for Phase II: crafting a solid strategy for statewide organizing to shut these units down. What we learn through this research will help us determine which system or unit has the most egregious abuses, which is the most likely to reform, and what approach (legislative reform, grassroots organizing, litigation) is most appropriate for the campaign. A STOPMAX National report will also be published. This Phase II organizing period will be an ongoing, three-year process.

Contact Us

We welcome your participation. You may contact us via phone, email or by writing to us:

National STOPMAX Campaign

AFSC

501 Cherry Street

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

19102 Phone (215) 241-7137

Fax (215) 241-7119

If you would like to receive regular updates concerning developments or media coverage regarding prison isolation, please write to stopmax@afsc.org and subscribe to our monthly STOPMAX news digest!

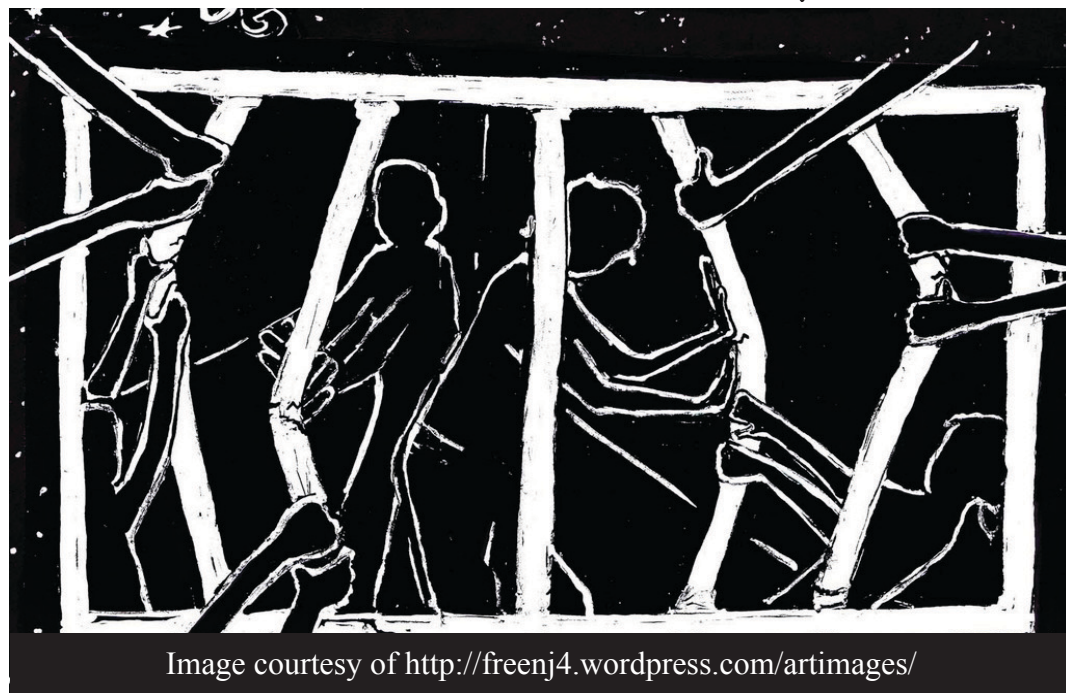


Image courtesy of <http://freenj4.wordpress.com/artimages/>

Bay Area NJ4 Solidarity Committee

On August 18, 2006, seven young African American lesbians traveled to New York City's Greenwich Village from their homes in Newark for a night out. When walking down the street, a male bystander sexually propositioned one of the women. After refusing to take no for an answer, he physically assaulted them. The women tried to defend themselves, and a fight broke out.

The women were charged with Gang Assault in the second degree, a Class C Felony with a mandatory minimum of 3.5 years. Patreese Johnson was additionally charged with First Degree Assault. Three of the women accepted plea offers. On June 14, 2007, Venice Brown, Terrain Dandridge, Patreese Johnson, and Renata Hill received sentences ranging from 3.5 to 11 years in prison.

Terrain Dandridge's appeal has been successful and she was released from Albion Correctional Facility on Monday, June 23, 2008! Terrain Dandridge's case was overturned, all her charges were dropped, and her record has been cleared. Renata Hill is awaiting a new trial concerning the events that occurred the night of August 18, 2006.

The lawyers, who agreed that there was no strategy for involving grassroots support in the appeals process, have called this, "a miracle." Terrain's lawyer has acknowledged that to be granted a new trial is rare; to have charges dropped is unprecedented. The Bay Area Solidarity Committee realizes that regardless of whether we were factored in by lawyers as part of the appeals process, this unprecedented turn of events had little to do with divisive legal strategy, an unjust system's benevolence, or retributive justice. Terrain's freedom is directly related to an international campaign of radical queers of color and their allies.

While we celebrate this victory, we mourn the divisive legal strategy, which has attempted to pit these friends and lovers against one another and further complicate those whose appeals are yet to be heard. Despite our great news, we must ensure that no one is left – not Venice, not Renata, not Patreese – to endure the horror of the prison industrial complex.

As a result of sexist, homophobic, and racist stereotypes held by law enforcement agents and institutions, the women later known as the New Jersey 4 (NJ4) were deemed to be a "lesbian wolfpack gang," who were organizing to terrorize straight men. Our stories are so often retold with a complete reversal of who is being harmed and who is doing the harming. The impacts of allowing Dwayne Buckle to be popularly depicted in the media and during the court proceedings as the "victim" fails to identify

how his desire to dominate women (and their spaces) only leads to the violence that resulted.

On a broader social level, such negligent media reporting, police investigation, and courtroom bias only promises to generate more of these same violent experiences, which target women and queers. The NJ4, like so many of us, are survivors of a system which incorrectly identifies the root causes of violence and crime, only to create conditions for mass incarceration and displacement of queers, who are already vulnerable to criminalization because of their race or class identity.

While, Monday, June 23rd marked Terrain's long-awaited release date from Albion Correctional Facility, where she has been caged for six hundred seventy-three days of her life. We must remember Terrain unjustly spent two years of her young life in prison, which cannot be returned to her. Chenese Loyal, Lania Daniels, and Khamysha Coates still have felony charges that prevent them from getting jobs, registering for housing and other unjust discrimination. Renata is still behind bars awaiting a new trial. Venice, sentenced to 5 years and Patreese, sentenced to 11 years, remain incarcerated, awaiting appeals to be heard in the fall. The 3 women will continue to navigate the legal system until the day comes when their stories will finally be heard without the racist, homophobic, sexist bias that denied them a fair trial to begin with.

For more information on NJ4 solidarity, please visit <http://freenj4.wordpress.com> or email: freenj4@yahoo.com

To contact the NJ4

Send a card or a letter. Your support matters to these women. This contact information is correct as of right now:

Patreese Johnson #07-G-0635
Bedford Hills Correctional Facility
P.O. Box 1000
Bedford Hills, NY 10507

Renata Hill #07-G-0636
Building 112A2
Bedford Hills Correctional Facility
P.O. Box 1000
Bedford Hills, NY 10507

Venice Brown #07-G-0640
Albion Correctional Facility
3595 State School Road
Albion, NY 14411-9399

Towards A Critically Integrated Politic: Anti-Violence Activism at the 10th Anniversary of Critical Resistance

By Alisa Bierria

It is an incredibly exciting time to be an anti-rape/domestic violence (or, just “anti-violence”) activist celebrating ten years of prison industrial complex (PIC) abolition organizing with Critical Resistance (CR). The significance of this moment shouldn’t be taken for granted. The relationship between the feminist anti-violence movement and the PIC abolition movement has not historically been one of easy solidarities.

Ten years ago, CR began with a bold mission of abolishing prisons, identifying the prison industry as a destructive, systematic, and persistent source of violence against oppressed communities. Yet CR’s founding conference in 1998 was held during a moment in which much of the anti-violence movement found itself deeply entangled with police and prisons in the name of protection of survivors of rape and abuse. Instead of resisting prisons and policing because of the way this system creates, motivates, and reinforces rape and domestic violence both inside and outside of prisons, the anti-violence movement had developed a practice of collaborating with the state to increase police and prisons as a (frequently failed) means to increase safety for survivors of violence. (For a longer analysis about the anti-violence movement’s relationship with prisons and police, please visit the Incite National website.)

On the other hand, PIC abolition efforts didn’t exactly center the problem of domestic violence and sexual violence within the community. Calls for PIC abolition were often not accompanied by recognition of the needs of survivors of domestic violence and sexual violence or the need for organizing efforts to ensure safety in the community without relying on police or prisons. The political agenda of addressing this kind of community violence was not necessarily prioritized or seen as central to prison abolition in the early days of prison abolition efforts. Additionally, though survivors of rape and abuse often engage in criminalized survival activities that led to incarceration, their experiences of violence both in the community and in the prison industrial complex were not necessarily reflected in prison abolition analysis. While many abolitionists rightfully acknowledged that prisons only reinforce the conditions that enable domestic and sexual violence, addressing the experiences of incarcerated survivors of violence and imagining and developing alternatives to prisons to address gender violence was not necessarily seen as fundamental to the politic of PIC abolition.

These two critical political movements worked in contradiction to one another, both marginalized the experiences of women of color and

folks of color who identify as trans, two-spirit, or gender non-conforming. For the anti-violence movement, the normative survivor of violence was generally considered a white, heterosexual, middle-class woman who had no experience engaging in criminalized activity. For the PIC abolition movement, the normative prisoner was generally considered a heterosexual man of color who did not necessarily experience violence within his community on the outside. Both po-

gies. The contradiction within the anti-violence movement as it related to its collaboration with the criminal justice system (as well as the medical industry and other violent institutions) became clearer the more participants nurtured a cross-movement ethic. INCITE! was established as a result of this historic conference, and from its beginning, understood the need for the project to be cross-movement in nature because of the organizational goal of “ending violence in all its forms.”



Art by Erik Ruin

litical communities failed to see how the intersections of white supremacy and gender-based oppression defined the way in which gender violence and incarceration mutually reinforce

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one another for all survivors and all prisoners. The opportunity for transforming the two movements through centering the analyses and experiences of women of color was helped by the founding of Critical Resistance, as well as INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence, two years later. In 2000, radical women of color within the anti-violence movement organized a conference to expand the definition of “violence against women” to include prisons, militarism, reproductive violence, colonization, medical violence, and poverty. Thousands of women of color attended the conference, engaging in the conversation from many different social movements as points of reference. The conference helped to spark cross-movement dialogue which fundamentally challenged the way in which participants thought about their own organizing strate-

This cross-movement ethic became more established when, in 2001, a group primarily consisting of women of color from Critical Resistance and INCITE! sat down for a weekend and created the Statement on Gender Violence & The Prison Industrial Complex. This statement turned out to be a vital organizing tool. It discussed the ways in which each movement was counter-productive to the other and, therefore, kept them from being as effective, creative, and powerful as they could be. The statement then recommended eleven concrete steps that each movement could take to transform the con-

tradictory position between movements into a position of a critically integrated politic.

By “critically integrated politic,” I suggest a politic among movements with distinct agendas that does not simply declare solidarity because they are both on the Left. Instead, the movements build an intentional relationship in which they can articulate reasons why their solidarity with each other is essential for their own agenda. They use constructive criticism for the purposes of strengthening each other’s work, which in turn strengthens their own. They begin to see each other’s agenda as fundamental to the success of their own, rather than disconnected or vaguely related. They articulate a shared political analysis to which they are both accountable. They create strategic partnerships and projects to achieve important goals. In other words, movements operating from a critically integrated politic build partnerships with other movements based on deliberate practices that acknowledge the ways in which the agendas of each movement are undeniably intertwined. Because of the differences between the movements, but deep interdependence of their work, the collaboration challenges assumptions made by movement participants, and often transforms political practices and analyses, making the work more dynamic, creative, contextual, and strategic.

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Ask the Abolitionist



Dear Readers,

As all Critical Resistance members know, asking and answering tough questions about abolition is key to being part of the movement to end the prison industrial complex. Since this is something we do with each other all the time, we thought it might be useful to engage those discussions in a public forum like this one. And what better format than the tried and true “Dear Abolitionist!”

Please help make this dialogue a lively and fruitful one by sending questions, responses to questions, responses to the responses—you get the idea. No question is too big or small.

Just send to: *Dear Abolitionist*
c/o *The Abolitionist*
Critical Resistance
1904 Franklin St., Suite 504
Oakland, CA 94612

Dear Abolitionist,

Recently at my job, one of my clients who is very mentally unstable attacked and choked my co-worker. We knew he was going to come back the next day, so my boss called the local cop to warn him this person might be around. I pled with her not to get the cops involved and they all said I was an idiot. What else could have been suggested or done differently?

Anonymous CR member

Dear Member/Fellow Abolitionist,

You raise two the key challenges our movement faces right now—one, the lack of working models for immediate, other-than-police intervention in situations of violence; and two, the complete void of mental health services that leaves the prison industrial complex (PIC) as the dominant option for responding to mental illness.

Ideally, I believe a team of people trained in mental health and conflict resolution could have intervened to help you and your co-workers feel safe, and to address the needs of your client. And whereas the cops can only be called

after an instance of violence has occurred, such a team could potentially have intervened before the situation escalated. The problem is there was no such team you knew of to call.

Some CR members have developed a 4-part framework for addressing harm without the PIC that may be helpful here. The four arms are prevention, intervention, reparation, and transformation, and the idea is that we must practice all four arms simultaneously. So my first thought in reading your letter was, what could have been done to prevent this situation? Did this person who harmed your co-worker have all of the support and services he needed and did your organization have enough resources and support to provide those services? Were there any warning signs that signaled a need for earlier intervention? If so, was there anything that could have been done to keep the situation from escalating?

In terms of what you could have proposed in the moment, I wonder if there was anyone else your boss could have called? Is there an allied organization, a friend of the client, other community members or neighbors who support your work? Could you have increased the number of people at your job the next day to help you and your co-workers feel safe?

Perhaps there was no other immediate option your boss and co-workers could foresee. If so, the question then becomes, what do we need to build so that next time there's an

incident, there is an alternative? Starting now, I believe we need to build conflict resolution/harm response teams of respected community leaders in every neighborhood that people know about, trust, and can call upon in situations like the one you describe. It is our belief that many people recognize that calling the police often brings more harm, and would gladly call someone else if there were someone else to call.

In terms of reparation and community accountability, I also think that as we begin to implement new strategies, we will need to more fully address the question of mental health. For example, how do we have open communication and hold each other accountable when someone with a severe mental illness is involved? Finally, as we put in the hard work to build abolitionist alternatives to harm, we also must continue to pressure all levels of government to take money from the PIC and invest it in counseling and mental health services, education, health-care, and youth programs. Until this happens, we will likely find ourselves caught in these kinds of situations, without the resources or support we need in order to truly put more effective models for addressing harm into practice.

Question answered by
C.R. member Melissa Burch

For more information on alternative methods to addressing harm in an abolitionist framework, please see the resources section.

Solitary Confinement in the Land of OZ

By a prisoner in solitary confinement at El Dorado Correctional Facility, Kansas

The El Dorado prison is the solitary confinement warehouse where the state hides its human abuse behind clean buildings and shined floors!

Up to 500 men languish in “administrative segregation,” a code word used to keep people locked down for years without real reason.

This is a brief glimpse into our world.

In how many more ways are you going to treat me like an animal? For 5 years you have kept me confined in this 10 x 7 foot concrete cage because it's “good political posturing.” During that entire time there has not been one incident to justify this treatment. By design, this facility was created to inflict physical and psychological harm, to punish in inhumane ways, to deprive humans of all senses, taste, smell, sound, sight, and human touch. It is a modern draconian dungeon that equals the cruelty of Abu Ghraib or Guantanamo Bay.

I have witnessed the horror of your planned torture: men psychologically broken with intent, becoming increasingly psychotic with rage, and rightfully so. Human beings driven into the abyss of mental illness pound on the steel door until their hands and knuckles are bloody: screaming, pleading, “kill me or let me go!” Finally, strength and energy depleted, bleeding and broken, they give up and fall into an exhausted stupor of complete despair. This hell is created by a warden who portrays himself publically as a devout “Christian.” He's backed by a Department of Corrections that has

a political stranglehold on the state of Kansas.

So long you have denied me any humane treatment that I'm beginning to lose my mental capacity for rational thinking. Slowly, but surely my cognitive abilities are eroding and I must struggle daily just to maintain my sanity.

You deny me access to any programs and take away those “dangerous” fingernail clippers you sold me. I am fed rotting food and sour milk regularly by your contracted food service company. Just when I begin to think there are no more Machiavellian methods you can employ, your authority adds new cruel, sadistic “rules” to dehumanize me even more. You call it a “security need.”

There is no longer a library, even a list of library books. Now I must beg the guards for a book to read—if they have the time. Now you have taken my clothes and I am required to wear only underwear all day in my cell. You have shortened my recreation time. There are no clean hand towels for weeks at a time and occasionally no towels even for showers. You refuse to allow me meaningful visits with my family, or even to send them an annual photo-

graph so they will remember what I look like.

Where are the people who are supposed to protect us from this abuse? The contract mental health workers (I can't refer to them as professionals) who know the devastating mental effects of this torture have become “enablers” endorsing this treatment with their numbing silence. Afraid they will lose their job if they speak up.

The unit team manager, who is supposed to be the prisoners' voice, has become the chief agent of this torture and torment, relishing his authority over us so much that he proudly proclaims himself, “the bull dog who controls our lives.” I am a man, not an animal to be broken by degradation and planned mistreatment or stripped of my essence and humanity. I will not allow you to psychologically mutilate me.

Human cruelty, abuse, and sadism approved by authority are alive and cherished in the Heart of America—right here in the Land of OZ—practiced under the guise of security by the Kansas Department of Corrections—no, Corruption.

PERSPECTIVES ON CRITICAL RESISTANCE

EDITED BY LIZ SAMUELS AND DAVID STEIN

In reflecting on the 10 years of strategy and struggle to eliminate the prison industrial complex (PIC) that has been the history of Critical Resistance (CR), we talked with people who have been involved in different phases of CR's organizational development. We asked them to offer their thoughts about CR's past, present, and future. What follows are excerpts from those conversations.

HOW DID YOU GET INVOLVED WITH CR?

ANDREA SMITH (AS): I was on the committee that organized the first Critical Resistance conference in Berkeley.

NANCY STOLLER (NS): I was invited to join the first steering/planning committee about a year before CR #1 at Berkeley. I joined the committee and did various jobs before and during the conference. After the conference I was part of the collective that put out the special issue of *Social Justice*. [Vol. 27, No.3 (Fall 2000), "Critical Resistance to the Prison Industrial Complex"].

JULIA SUDBURY (JS): I got involved with the planning committee for the first CR in 1998. At that time, I wasn't aware of the anti-prison movement in the US and I had only been in the country for a year. I learned about the histories of struggle here as well as the contemporary conditions of incarceration and the rise of the PIC through conversations with organizers during the conference and strategy session planning process.

TERRY KUPERS (TK): I was a member of the organizing committee for the first CR conference in Berkeley. It was thrilling to see so many committed, beautiful people come together, find out that we are not alone in our work and our vision, and team up to move the struggle forward.

KAMARI CLARKE (KC): Between 1997 and 1998, I was involved with the cultural component [of the '98 Conference]. . . . I got involved in that capacity—thinking about cultural expressions of freedom—as ways to think about questions of justice and to envision a different world. . . . [CR was] trying to understand how the PIC is developing, how things have changed over time, and how those on the inside and the outside might engage in different forms of expression that are relevant to survival.

KIM DIEHL (KD): I feel a little bit like a veteran and I can't really say that for many other organizations. I've been involved in CR since before CR had a presence in the South and it has really changed the landscape of southern politics. [I'm] happy that that's happened because it's moved the prison industrial complex and southern politics to the forefront of our social movement in ways that maybe other issues haven't. People are really much more able to connect enslavement with prisons, or prisons with enslavement and that the South has built a ton of prisons in the last 20-30 years. So, I think the history of CR for me as a Southerner is really big.

TAMIKA MIDDLETON (TM): I came to CR during the organizing for CR South. I had never really done any organizing before that. It was really a huge crash course in organizing, the PIC, abolition, and even New Orleans and the South even though I'm a Southerner, and had been in New Orleans for a couple years. The work was exhilarating. I felt so empowered! It gave me a new sense of myself, and a new outlook on the world in which I lived. I can say with all honesty that becoming a part of CR changed my whole world.

ALEXIS PAULINE GUMBS (AG): My first organizing project with CR was planning for CR East in 2000-2001. I wasn't involved in a sustained way. So in some sense, CR10 program committee is my first real sustained organizing experience with CR.

DYLAN RODRIGUEZ (DR): My work with Critical Resistance has been the most humbling, mundane, and transformative political work in which I have ever engaged. I was a tiny part of the 18-month process of conceptualizing and organizing the first conference and strategy session at Berkeley in September 1998. . . . The first meeting of Critical Resistance, was only a faint indication of what was to come. The initial ambition was to attract 400 people to a conference and movement-building session that would push—or really, explode—the existing liberal and service-oriented frameworks through which organizations and individuals were essentially trying to manage, survive, and negotiate the prison industrial complex. The eventual turnout of 3,000-plus people at the first Critical Resistance conference and strategy session massively exceeded our wildest expectations and hopes, and I think it was no accident given that the tone and tenor of so many people at that 1998 event indicated that we were living in a moment of historical emergency that required new languages, new knowledges, new political labors.

ARI WOHLFEILER (AW): I first heard about CR from campus activists (students and staff) at UC Berkeley in 1999 who were involved in the third world Liberation Front (twLF) organizing effort to save the Ethnic Studies department from near total defunding and build a racial justice movement on campus in the post Prop 209 era (which ended Affirmative Action practices by the state of California). At that point, and I think this shows the incredible growth of the organization since the 1998 conference, I don't remember it being clear that CR was a membership or volunteer organization, whether it would continue to exist, whether it had campaigns, or what. It was just so much smaller than we are now - Rose, our first staffer, probably only worked part time then, CR East hadn't happened yet, and we hadn't formally figured out what type of organization we wanted to be.

WHAT WOULD YOU LIKE PEOPLE TO KNOW ABOUT THE HISTORY OF CR AND ITS ROLE WITHIN SOCIAL MOVEMENTS? WHAT ABOUT THE FUTURE OF CR, FOLLOWING CR10?

ROSE BRAZ (RB): Critical Resistance played a key role in re-invigorating what was a fairly dormant movement around prison issues. Moreover, CR pushed the debate and discussion from one that was very focused on reform to one that includes abolition as both a strategy and an end goal. In 1998, while there were numerous people and organizations working around conditions of confinement, the death penalty, etc., and in particular using litigation and research strategies to fight what would be popularized as the prison industrial complex, grassroots organizing challenging the PIC was at a low following the crackdown on the movement in the 1970s and 80s. CR played a key role in building the grassroots movement that exists today by pushing the idea that a grassroots movement is a necessary prerequisite to change and then bringing people together through our conferences, campaigns and projects toward the goal of helping to build that movement.

CR also has played a key role in altering the debate. Today, abolition is on the table, a goal that was not really on the agenda in 1998. A prerequisite to seeking any social change is the naming of it. In other words, even though the goal we seek may be far away, unless we name it and fight for it today, it will never come.

TM: CR South was a huge victory. Most Southern organizers that I know and have worked with will say the same. That was a huge breakthrough point in organizing against the PIC in the South. I think that the movement building and reframing that took place there was essential to the work, especially in the south where geography can make the work so isolated.

KC: [CR] pushed me to think about these mundane, everyday conceptions of justice, of prisons themselves, as if they do what popular culture thinks they do, as if they're meant to correct and help people. It pushed me in my own work and in my own teaching to get students to think more critically about those fictions in their lives and the implications as well as the ways that we're complicit in reproducing that fiction.

KAI LUMUMBA BARROW (KB): It's important for us to communicate with folks that we don't have answers; we are like everybody else, trying to figure out how to change the world. We have analysis, but not answers. We think our analysis is sound; it has historical roots and it's relevant to the direction that the world is moving and that the world is currently in terms of the need to repress and control people. It's important to note that we are bold and that often times when organizations are bold, there is a certain expectation that that organization or those people will lead us to freedom. [Additionally] we are fun and creative, and we are trying to live abolition and that is challenging, and that means challenging and questioning and resisting as frequently as possible all the ways that we harm each other and the ways that we are harmed and the ways that we harm ourselves.

This is a really important moment for us to actually go back to the table and revisit some of the assumptions we've had for so long and given the conditions and given the changes that are go-

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ing on in the world, it's just time to seize that moment; I would love to see that happen at CR10.

AW: One thing that is so important about CR is that we have existed in so many different forms and have tried so many strategies in our short life. CR isn't an organization that spends hours and hours painstakingly perfecting every single thing we put out there, or zeroing in on one campaign or project with huge amounts of our collective resources. As a result, we've tried lots of different things in lots of different places with lots of different people. We have messed up and learned hard lessons and dealt with serious pain and loss all along the way, and that benefits us all in the end. But the range of our work really does show how hard we've worked to meet the PIC at every point: anti-expansion work, reading groups, legal services, parties, radio shows, copwatching, lobbying, political education, publishing, grassroots fundraising, bodywork and healing projects, letter writing with prisoners, housing and environmental justice organizing.

BO BROWN (BB): I'd like to see more street awareness come to the issue; I know we have to do all those things [legislative goals] and I know that it's much easier to do the legislative shit and you get bigger feathers in your cap, but at some point I think it's really not about that. You have to do both. I think you can get lost in that and you can stay there and consider yourself a good person and never really get your hands dirty in a human kind of way. And I think that's not healthy. . . . And I think working more with ex-prisoners in our little offices and in our little groups as much as we can. I'd like to see us come up with some kind of support group for families of prisoners that's real. We need to figure out how to support the prisoners when they're coming home. We need to understand post-traumatic shock on an ongoing, day-to-day basis.

AS: Many of the "restorative" justice models used as an alternative to prisons don't work when it comes to gender violence, and I often don't see prison abolitionists taking seriously concerns about safety for domestic and sexual violence survivors. Thus, I think it is important for prison abolitionists to focus on prison abolition as a positive rather than a negative project. That is, it's not simply about tearing down prison walls, but it's about building alternative formations that actually protect people from violence that crowd out the criminalization regime.

KB: I would like to see us not be necessary anymore. I'd love to see us more rooted, not just in terms of community-based organizing, but to see more people who are directly impacted by the PIC more active in the organizing around it. I want to see us actively engaging each other more around the areas where we are challenged, both personally and politically. I want to see us be able to have honest dialog and struggle even though we might be afraid about hurting each others feelings, or being outcast. . . . everything I want to see for CR, I also want to see for our community, and I don't mean that just geographically. So I want to see us being able to sit down and struggle together; I want to see us become more accountable to each other and define what that accountability means, to establish for ourselves a set of guidelines and principles that we can all agree to and change as we go along.

AG: I think CR is already up to this, but I really crave more nitty gritty details about what aboli-

tion looks like in people's daily lives. I am really excited about hearing more about community experiments...ways that people are replacing and outmoding cultures of punishment all the time.

NS: I think [US-based] abolitionists should study more how people in other countries are reducing their prison and jail populations. We should promote their strategies, explain how the fear of the other is reduced in other countries, and work more on fighting racism as a part of abolition work.

TM: I would really like to see more cultural work in CR. I think that young people and people of color outside of the progressive world understand the PIC in a very real way. What would it look like to talk about abolition to a sixteen year old Black boy who sets his watch to 106 and Park and knows all the words to the latest Plies album? How do we reach out to artists like Plies who rhyme about the hardships of the system, but without making a political connection?

VANESSA HUANG (VH): My peers and comrades across a range of social justice movements share the vision and practice of developing accountability as a grounding point for our lives and political work, paid and unpaid. I think this speaks volumes to how we've centered the need to respond to and ultimately end the harms we face.

RACHEL HERZING (RH): We've done a good job at getting people with a myopic focus on imprisonment, even among abolitionists, to really think about the broader forces at work that make it possible to imprison people. It's been really important for us to articulate that and to have that always on our lips, because it keeps the entirety of the picture in focus. That's a huge challenge for us organizationally to manage and we have a difficult time maintaining all of the different irons that we have in the fire at any given time, because this issue is so mammoth and ever-changing, and interconnected and complicated. At the same time, it helps us make abolition more common-sensical to show the connections between all of these systems and practices and ideas, because people can always find a point of entry.

I want to see the movement grow. I don't have an investment in CR becoming big or powerful. We're very low profile. I do have an investment in more people being open to abolition as well as an investment for our allies to be able to work with us toward abolitionist goals.

TK: Litigation is important, of course, but not sufficient to make real change. There needs to be a loud public outcry for real justice, and that requires educating and organizing people. Of course that's where CR plays a crucial role. Also, fear of crime in low-income communities is real. We need to speak to that fear in sensitive ways to bring more people into the movement for transformative justice. CR is in the frontline of those decrying the regressive trading away of liberties for an illusory sense of "safety," for example the Patriot Act and pre-emptive detention. Immigration lock-ups are some of the most abusive correctional facilities in the country. The struggle for transformative justice involves all the institutions of government and civil society, and I want to see CR continue and expand its links with others in the larger struggle.

RB: One big obstacle to abolitionist organizing is the erroneous belief by some that if you are an abolitionist, you don't care about conditions inside. In reality, nothing could be further from the truth. What is true is that as an

abolitionist, I think the best way to improve conditions for people inside is to get them out.

I have seen CR's work become more coordinated, more sophisticated in employing multiple strategies and more challenging as the system has responded and adjusted to some of our successes. Most recently, we have seen our denunciation of conditions inside twisted by the state into justifications for expanding the system, particularly through what are sometimes called "boutique prisons." What's new and more insidious about this expansion is that it has not been couched in "tough on crime" rhetoric that politicians usually employ to justify expansion. Rather, in response to growing anti-prison public sentiment, these plans have been grounded on the rhetoric of "prison reform" and in regard to people in women's prisons: "gender responsiveness."

VH: We're now a part of emerging and overlapping conversations and movements that are building and growing who, what, why, how, and where we talk about and organize around gender, to begin to integrate gender self-determination and gender liberation framework and practice with existing frameworks challenging white supremacy and capitalism and patriarchy as critical to prison industrial complex abolition. Many of us have drawn tremendous lessons and inspiration from our organizing to found Transforming Justice, a national coalition supporting local organizing to end the criminalization and imprisonment of transgender and gender non-conforming communities.

JS: I would like to see us grow in developing a deep understanding of the need for healing as an abolitionist practice. Many of us come to this work with our own wounds, whether from childhood trauma, racism, homophobia or the violence of police and prisons. In fact, many of us draw energy and inspiration from these wounds and the anger they create. But we also are drained by these traumas. Or we find ourselves neglecting our bodies and spirits in the same ways that we may have been neglected in the past. As a result, our movement can be very "head" oriented—talking, planning, thinking, writing—and not body and emotion oriented. This work doesn't have to be individualistic or separate from movement work, we can include it in all our movement spaces and make it a collective activity, just like the community recovery movement. But a movement against a violent and violating phenomenon like the PIC cannot hope to be successful if we don't directly address and heal the effects of that violence.

DR: It's both a tremendous obligation and honor to undertake the unfulfilled work of the best of our abolitionist precursors—those who did not only want the abolition of white supremacist slavery and normalized anti-Black violence, but who also recognized that the greatest promise of abolitionism was a comprehensive transformation of a civilization in which the sanctity of white civil society was defined by its capacity to define "community" and "safety" through the effectiveness of its ability to wage racial genocides. The present day work of CR and abolition has to proceed with organic recognition of its historical roots in liberation struggles against slavery, colonization, and conquest—and therefore struggle to constantly develop effective, creative, and politically educating forms of radical movement against the genocidal white supremacist state and the society to which it's tethered.

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prison system as guard, group therapist, Director of Parole, and Superintendent at Atlanta, Terre Haute, Florence, and Lorton. Everywhere he went his skin color, philosophies, and methods challenged established prison ideologies and order.

His appointment as Commissioner of Corrections in Massachusetts put him in charge of an entirely white staff. Bissonnette notes, "Boone's appointment placed institutional power into the hands of a Black man, a rarity in Massachusetts at the time. Black leadership, from the community level, with the Black Panther Party, to the state level, with elected legislators, would form a network around the new commissioner. They not only supported him, they would consciously and strategically use his access to power to reveal the racism of the criminal justice system."

At the center of Boone's "Black criminology" were community participation and programs. According to Bissonnette, his philosophy rested on the belief that, "each prisoner knew the limits of agency and amount of freedom that he or she could handle. If prisoners were able to think through and articulate a plan of rehabilitation that would not put the individuals, their families, or their communities at risk, Boone was willing to give them permission to execute their plans."

"Boone was realistic about what it would take for prisoners to succeed outside the walls, and sincerely wanted all prisoners to have these necessary resources. Rehabilitation would require skills training, education, and integration into the workforce. He condemned the prevalent concepts of rehabilitation because they focused only on the individual, as if there were no institutional barriers to re-integrating prisoners. He warned, 'Crime will continue to destroy individuals, neighborhoods, and communities if programs and opportunities do not go hand in hand.'"

Boone required staffing support for increased vocational training and education. Because he was unable to fire existing staffers, due to collective bargaining agreements that precluded layoffs, he hired teachers, psychologists, and social workers. Bissonnette notes, "The guards became idle and the prisoners demonstrated that they could maintain order in the blocks, cook their food, and repair the facilities. The lack of a role for guards further undermined the traditional staff role in the institution."

Boone's staff appointments reflected his give-and-take strategy. He broke the department into six divisions: Security and Management, Classification and Parole, Community Corrections, Planning and Research, Volunteer Services, and Public Information. His appointment of Robert "More Gas" Moore as head of security was offset by the likes of Walter Williams, "the former director of Boston's Manpower," and Bill Farmer, a former prisoner who worked with Boone in Atlanta.

Boone's abolition strategy was "shortening the line," or decarceration, and fiscal responsibility. "Boone's initial budget request for fiscal year 1974 would decrease \$1.1 million. Boone planned to save money by reducing staff," explains Bissonnette. With layoffs out of the question, he froze hiring across the DOC. Boone figured 100 staffers would leave the DOC a year

through retirement, resignation, and death.

Boone was caught in a tug of war from every direction. The guards union hated his guts and the *Boston Herald American (Herald)* painted him as a meddling threat to public safety. Throughout his tenure, his authority was sabotaged by "guard riots." Boone's unenviable task was to balance the competing forces for long enough to institute his reform program. He turned to the community for reinforcement.

— THE ARC OF RESISTANCE —

Packard Mansé's outreach to churches and synagogues helped them recruit key community religious leaders like Edward Rodman. Rodman

The new leadership knew that to transform from a group of individuals to a unified body acting in a democratic, collective interest required the general population to elevate their consciousness and commitment to unity.

was a young, Black radical Episcopal priest who had worked with the Congress of Racial Equality and served on the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee's steering committee.

Rodman was adept at organizing and building broad coalitions. He was able to engage the Black United Front, the Black Panther Party, and the Roxbury Action Project even though they were wary of Boone and the AHC's leadership. Rodman used this grassroots pressure to push the largely white AHC toward a more abolitionist vision and politic. He built a web of support for Boone among the Black power players in the community.

Rodman explains, "I wanted to see Walpole closed. As long as Walpole was open, it could be used in any way the administration wanted to use it, to manipulate it. The prison was a human tragedy. For the prisoners, it was their world; they fought for control of that dynamic community. The prisoner alliance community had the responsibility to help them keep it in perspective. The prisoners have no other

not actually living in the prison 24/7, that they would not completely appreciate our strategies of confrontation. It was up to us to spearhead the internal struggle ourselves, where they persuaded the politicians in the outside community toward our mutual end with their firsthand reports. We simply said, 'Stand back, and let us do this.'"

Hamm concludes: "Prisoners cannot rely on outside community supporters to format their struggle, nor to spearhead their fight for autonomy inside. For twelve long weeks the NPRA proved that prisoners could govern themselves. As a result, I came to see prison reform as being unrealistic; as making a prison an illusory better place to live does not alter the governmental concept of the institution, it simply attempts to make it more palatable for public consumption."

Dellelo knew that for the NPRA to be legitimate it had to be democratically elected. As chair of the Inmate Advisory Council, he called for the prisoners to assemble in the auditorium. "The racial tension in the prison was thick. Black Power was bouncing...I said, 'There is only one color and that is blue.' The guards wore...brown; the prisoners were wearing blue. It was blue versus brown. 'You are either blue or brown. There is no in-between ground. We are all in this together...we can't have no more beefs for six months,'" recounts Dellelo.

The prisoners were forewarned that anyone who broke the truce would be taken out. "That made a lot of people feel very, very safe. The guards could not work us like before. If we refused to fight each other, they lost a lot of their power. There was a peace across the prison that never was there before. We ended the body count," continues Dellelo.

John McGrath argues, "The NPRA had to be about equality not about equal opportunity. That didn't work on the street and it sure wasn't

going to work inside." The white prisoners were fearful that the Black and Latino prisoners would form a block and overrule them. The Latino prisoners suggested that they have only three representatives because of their "small numbers." They settled on a 21-member board and "agreed they would vote from their hearts as men and not because of their skin color."

Elections took place in September 1972 to determine prisoner representation in negotiations with the administration and guards' union. Every active prisoner group at Walpole was on the ballot to assure fairness; and teams of observers certified that the tally was transparent and accurate. The NPRA was victorious.

They then selected the 21-member internal board. Ralph Hamm was chosen as a leader.

He writes, "One of the principal strategies of the NPRA was to ensure that there was not one person who could be singled out as the leader, to avoid the killing of the body by cutting off the head. We hid our leadership potential under our ethnicities, using the accepted stereotypes of society to shield us from detection. We knew that the powers-that-be had a point of view of our struggle based upon those stereotypes, and we used that against them. The NPRA was a multifaceted, multi-headed Hydra. Our Board of Directors consisted of twenty-one prisoners, and hidden within those twenty-one were six potential leaders who could replace one another

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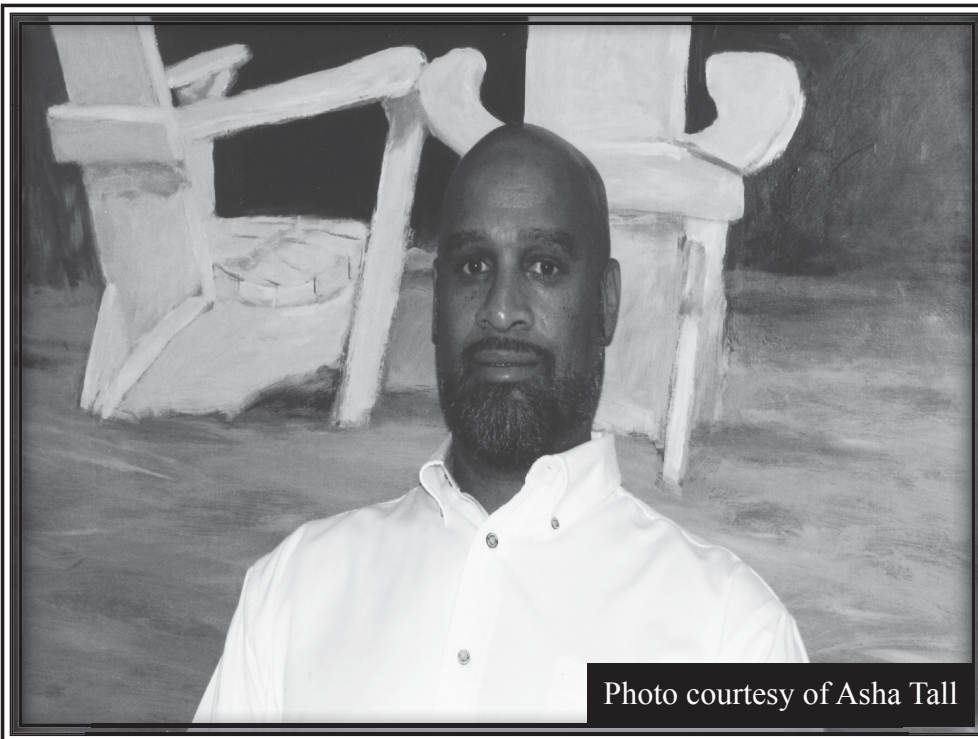


Photo courtesy of Asha Tall

view to the rest of the community. Eventually, the community and the prisoners began to see the NPRA as a vehicle to abolish prisons."

"For the most part, all of the community involvement worked and was a godsend. With the exception of the Observer Program, most of our civilian support was out of harm's way and we encouraged them to pursue our visible political agenda from the street, while we bore the brunt of the frontline battles inside. The observers served as our media outlet concerning the daily happenings in the prison, much like the press serves the armed forces of this country during war," recalls Hamm.

There was a persistent strain between the prisoners and civilians because of their respective "fields of engagement." Hamm continues, "We understood that by the civilians

if the need arose. We also groomed and shielded possible leaders removed from the immediate knowledge of the general population, the majority of the Board of the NPRA, as well as from our outside supporters, in case the chairman or the entire original Board were shanghaied.”

The peace between prisoners was maintained through a combination of conflict resolution and imminent threat. The “hard core” was on call in case there were any egregious breaches of the truce. “Conflict resolution was usually handled by Larry Rooney, Robert Dellelo, and myself, the block representatives, or any combination of the aforementioned. Walpole Prison was small enough where conflicts could be reasonably addressed. If the conflict happened to be ethnic group related, a ‘salt and pepper’ team would respond, and would strongly recommend that it be quickly resolved now...that the principals attend a consciousness workshop sponsored by BANTU... allow the block representatives to mediate and abide by their decision; or we would return with the ‘hard core’ and take it to another level,” explains Hamm.

As the NPRA came to power in September of 1972, “Crazy Ray” Porelle became warden. Porelle had been Boone’s security assistant at USP Lorton. His appointment drove a wedge between Boone and the prisoners. “Porelle was a ‘strong-

arm’ man, accustomed to a very different style of leadership. He was a white southerner—which put the Black population on edge. Accustomed to working in prisons where the majority population was Black, he relied on a divide-and-conquer strategy to maintain a population he considered racially inferior,” writes Bissonnette. Boone reasoned he was severe, but fair. He hoped Porelle would reign in the situation at Walpole. This was a monumental miscalculation.

At every turn, Porelle and his “goon squad” turned the screws on the prisoners. He played the race card whenever possible and instituted a cadre and phase system to divide the prisoners. He tear-gassed indiscriminately.

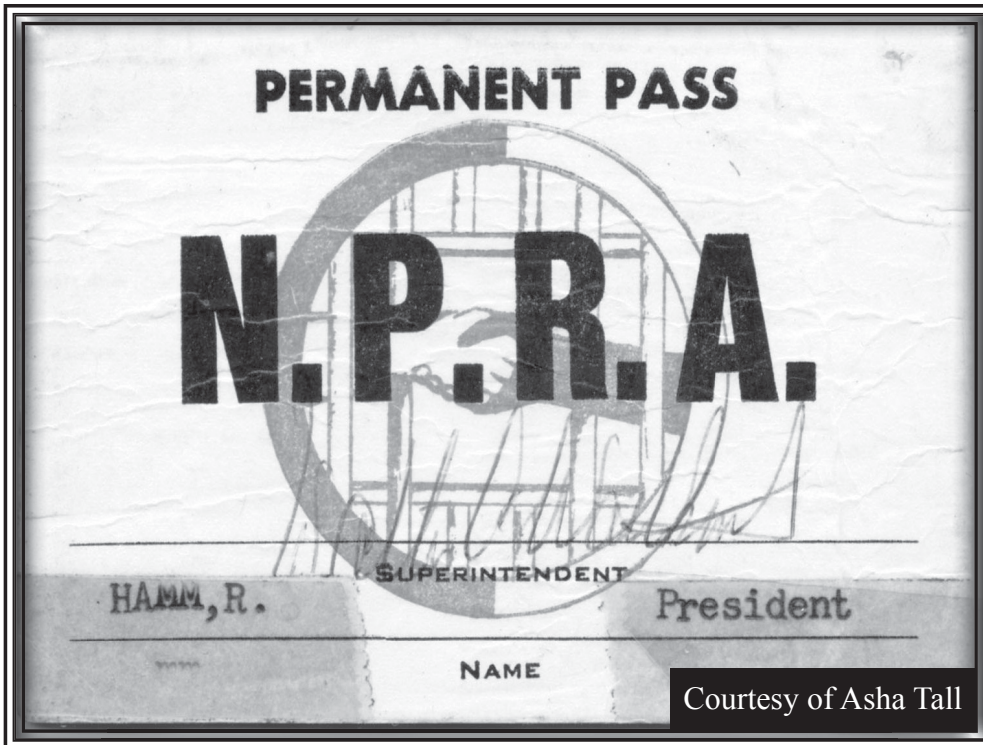
“Rather than the programming needed to rehabilitate prisoners that was called for in Chapter 777, ‘treatment’ was punishment by segregation. Under the new system, prisoners who demonstrated their willingness to follow Porelle’s rules were given ‘cadre’ status. The cadres were assigned to A-1 Block and were expected to ‘assist the superintendent in running the prison. The second part of Porelle’s classification scheme was a system of ‘phases.’ Phase 2 was segregation. Prisoners who cooperated with the guards would be moved from Phase 2 to Phase 1, general population, where they would be able to get furloughs. The prisoners recognized this phase system for what it was: behavior modification,” explains Bissonnette.

Porelle allowed prisoner self-help groups to celebrate the holidays as part of his carrot and stick approach. BANTU and its supporters raised \$1,600 to celebrate the principles of Kwanzaa: self-determination, collective work, and responsibility. They rented buses to bring their families to the prison.

The Kwanzaa event was just about to commence when Porelle called for a major shakedown. The prisoners’ families and friends were left outside the gates in the cold. This slap in the face was tantamount to war. Porelle said he got tipped off that a motorcycle gang was

going to assault Walpole. The guards goaded the Black prisoners during the shakedown by thanking them for the food. BANTU and the Black prisoner population “resolved that even though Porelle started it, they would end it.” Porelle provided the “single profound catalyst that pushed the Black prisoner population to form the NPRA Alliance,” writes Hamm.

“The Kwanzaa lockdown was brutal. Prisoners subsisted on corn flakes with powdered milk and bologna-and-cheese sandwiches. Guards beat them. They fought back, throwing excrement and food at their captors, and, again, refusing to clean up the mess. Isolated and in despair, some



prisoners changed themselves,” asserts Bissonnette.

The reform project was in crisis. Porelle tried to ship prisoners out of state, but the courts returned them. To interrupt NPRA planning and programming and sow animosity, Porelle moved all the white prisoners to the maximum-security end of the prison and all the Black prisoners to the minimum-security side.

“They could get word to the white prisoners and vice versa, but they could not meet directly. This reality would compromise trust and strain relationships, but - due to the work of Dellelo - the prisoners stayed unified. The white prisoners took the brunt of the oppression handed down by Porelle. The Black prisoners took the responsibility for waging the campaign of non-cooperation in order to force Porelle’s resignation. Every time Porelle moved to open the prison, the Black prisoners would do something to lock it down again, while the white prisoners refused to cooperate with the phase system or accept furloughs,” writes Bissonnette.

“The prisoners slowly began to see themselves as one class, with one cause, serving one purpose. We had linked our collective consciousness upon the commonality of the oppressed class,” R.Hamm

In February of 1973, the NPRA released their “Manifesto of Inhumanity,” detailing the “destruction of the prisoners’ hope for reform... [and the] utter negation of the humanity of the Walpole prisoners.” Solomon Brown - NPRA’s secretary and chairman of BANTU’s board of directors - signed the document, confirming the centrality of Black leadership in the NPRA.

“Because of his connection to BANTU leadership, Rodman was aware that allowing the prison to open up would undercut the prisoners’ strategy—demonstrating the power they could wield to disrupt the prison’s operation, if conditions weren’t changed. The AHC leadership seemed to focus on the end of lockdown, not the resolution of the problems that caused it,” suggests Bissonnette.

The tension between the prisoners and their supporters mounted. According to

Bissonnette, “The men understood that there were two separate, although related, initiatives: the prison-reform movement and their own struggle for dignity and self-determination. While the AHC and other supporters were willing to take the time to work through the system without directly challenging it, the prisoners were the quintessential outlaws - they did not work through or ‘respect’ the system; nor did they trust any outsiders to really have their interests at heart.”

A deal was finally brokered between Porelle and the Colo Commission. In predictable fashion, the commission set to finding a resolution without acknowledging that some of the architects of this resolution were themselves the problem. Porelle was vindicated by the deal reached by the Commission. The NPRA, in turn, demanded Porelle’s resignation. Boone beseeched the prisoners in a letter to negotiate in good faith. Guards got hold of the letter and used it in the press to portray Boone as a man who had lost control.

Porelle’s divisive tactics started to pay dividends. “There was a breakdown between the Black and white prisoners because the white prisoners thought that the Black prisoners had sold them out. When I finally got the whole [NPR] board together, after the civilians had left, the guys faced off...It got really hot and guys were calling

each other a lot of racist shit. Ralph Hamm gets up and says, ‘I didn’t ask to go to fucking minimum. They just took me out.’ Other guys described what happened...And I says, ‘Okay, all of you shut up.’ I run it down for them. ‘This was done to break our unity. We didn’t do this to each other. They did it to us.’ They get it. They’re like, ‘It’s okay, we’re straight.’ Everybody was pissed off and we were back as one solid movement. We went back to kicking ass,” explains Dellelo.

When the press finally entered Walpole, the NPRA outlined their grievances, called for amnesty for prisoners involved in the resistance, and demanded Porelle be fired. Fifty community representatives from legislative bodies, the AHC, and the NPRA’s external board stayed to negotiate a deal between the prisoners and administration.

The prisoners demanded not only due process, but also real power in defining and implementing reforms. Guards who felt endangered by Porelle’s heavy-handed tactics and the volatile atmosphere they instituted discreetly asked the legislature for his resignation. John Foley, Walpole’s Catholic Chaplain, weighed in for the NPRA with an indictment of the Walpole

prison officials’ actions. His criticism set in motion a call for abolition by the Priests’ Senate of the Archdiocese of Boston. Cardinal Medeiros set up a “permanent commission on penal reform.”

On March 2, 1973, Porelle was forced to resign. He blamed the guards for misunderstanding his orders. The guards responded with a work slowdown. The NPRA called off the strike that had begun December 29. “For the first time in 72 days, these men [from 9 and 10 Blocks who were on strike] were able to take showers, shave, change into clean clothes, and eat hot food. With Porelle’s resignation, the NPRA had its first concrete win and an opportunity to gain substantial power,” writes Bissonnette.

The NPRA set to work cleaning the prison and implementing their program. The NPRA

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SHANA AGID (SA): I think [there] was a massive shift, whose initial foundation was created by [CR's] 1998 conference, that grew directly out of on-the-ground work and struggle to figure out work and engage with other groups doing work that ran counter to CR's mission—to not support any work that extends the life or scope of the PIC. That language was, not surprisingly, [a] risk, because really, that can be almost any kind of reform. That was even more true in some ways 10 years ago. [Another] big shift in our thinking is guiding alternative means of both preventing and addressing harm and the conditions that make people so vulnerable to the system. I can absolutely see this in the kinds of sessions proposed for CR10. We've got at least five or six proposals dealing with the idea in innovative, contemporary, community-based and grounded ways for CR10—both efforts underway and visions for learning more. I'm most excited by this.

KD: I think also with faith-based groups, we have more work to do, because a lot of faith-based groups benefit from prisons and I would like to see that shift in the next ten years. I would really like to see that change in the next ten years—have more radical work because that's what really moved slavery was when the churches started to take stands against it, and right now churches love going into prisons and all religions, except Judaism, I don't really hear a lot of Rabbis going over there. CR has to make it clear that the priorities of our government are basically to increase "security" and not necessarily the quality of life for people.

BB: I'd like people to know that CR10 is able to happen after 10 years. And hopefully we'll be able to have at least 3,500 people here again—and more ex-prisoners. And I think if you're in the prison abolition movement, if you're doing your job correctly, you have to intersect with other social movements—we cannot have tunnel vision.

HOW DOES CR'S WORK INTERSECT WITH OTHER ORGANIZING STRATEGIES AND MOVEMENTS YOU ARE A PART OF?

KB: The last bulk of my organizing work has been specifically around political prisoners, so the obvious connection there is challenging the PIC as a space for halting dissent. I've also done a lot of work over the years around police violence, [and see] CR as a space for challenging the notion of policing in and of itself, not just around violence—police violence—but what gives this body of people an authority to control and militarize communities. And the third area, in terms of my work is surrounding violence—sexual violence—specifically, I've done work around violence against women and that's included work around systems such as health care, systems such as reproductive freedom, as well as issues around interpersonal violence. How can we challenge how we harm each other and how can we come up with different strategies for dealing with the way we harm each other and the ways that the state harms us? As a visual artist, I try to focus on representations, ideas, and commentary that focus on unleashing the imagination [and] on resistance that attempts to encourage us to imagine different realities? For me, that's the values piece to Critical Resistance that's most important.

AS: I work on gender violence issues, where it is clear that the criminalization ap-

proach proffered in the mainstream anti-violence movement doesn't work. And also this criminalization approach obfuscates the role of the state in perpetrating gender violence. At the same time, we have to deal with the practical concerns for safety for survivors of domestic and sexual violence. Thus, we are working on developing community accountability strategies that do not rely on the state and also do not depend on a romanticized notion of "community." This work goes to show the importance of developing alternative governance structures outside the nation-state system, of which the PIC is simply an arm. This intersects with work in indigenous rights movements which have concepts of indigenous nationhood that are not based on nation-state forms of governance which rule through violence, domination, and control.

KD: I work for a union; I just left a meeting with some workers at Ft. Lauderdale airport, who are cleaners, they're almost all Haitian; Haitians here in Miami are almost all treated differently when they come here. For example Cubans, once they hit land, [there is a policy] called, "wet-foot-dry-foot" and they're completely able to become legal residents, but with Haitians, they are immediately put in detention, so that's a really big issue here. I just sat with a group of Haitian workers who face this everyday. There's always the fear of raids and that plays in with our organizing because a lot of people not only have fear about losing their jobs, but fear having their homes raided in the middle of the night and having family members taken.

I also have been staff and a volunteer for a queer youth center here. A lot of [the youth] come from families that are first generation here, that are immigrants, and mostly from working-class, low-income, communities of color. They're always coming to the center with stories about how the police harass them.

AG: Abolition provides a crucial challenge to how I work to respond to and end gendered violence against people of color in a way that really transforms our communities instead of locking us away from each other. Abolition provides an imperative for the anti-capitalist and economic justice work I do because it reveals the costs of capitalism (a profound and deadly disconnection from ourselves and others epitomized by the prison industrial complex and the surveillance and policing state). I know that in order to have real safety we must have fair access to the resources we all need. By centering the needs and the voices of the most impacted, CR provides a context and an infrastructure for the young people I teach (who are legally barred from public school property and mostly also on probation) to become organizers and warriors for their own freedom which is what gives me hope every morning.

WHAT DOES PRISON INDUSTRIAL COMPLEX ABOLITION MEAN TO YOU?

KD: It's a bold declaration. It's a tradition of stating the impossible, bring[ing] people along with a conception of how the world could be without slavery, without an economic system that just seems completely unbeatable—and permanent and static.

RH: Prison industrial complex abolition is dreaming wildly and having that be okay. It's genuinely asking for what we want, rather than what we think we can win. Why should I not want to be completely liberated and have my people around me and feel healthy and stable and be able to engage with people to be able

to hold people accountable?

RB: Abolition defines both the end goal we seek and the way we do our work today. Abolition means a world where we do not use prisons, policing and the larger system of the prison industrial complex as an "answer" to what are social, political and economic problems. Abolition is not just an end goal but a strategy today.

SA: It means facilitating and creating a kind of safety few of us have likely known through self-determination and the capacity to struggle with each other and ourselves safely. Abolition of the PIC is, I think, about concrete struggle against the racial state in a political moment defined by a supposedly "post-racial" body politic where race is theoretically less and less in evidence—and other groups of people, like the mainstream LGBT movement or immigrants rights movement are banking on the notion that this is the mark of progress. Of course, race is not at all disappearing, except into the idea of crime and criminality, so that prisons and the PIC function as an articulation of racism that is, more or less, treated as inevitable or understandable. To struggle against this, I think, is to attempt both to work for lived lives and the people living them, and also to undo the "common sense" idea that the PIC makes sense of who belongs where and who deserves what.

AG: It means freedom now and day by day. It means accountability and love growing everywhere.

Contributors

Alexis Pauline Gumbs is a queer Black troublemaker. She works with Critical Resistance, SpiritHouse, Southerners on New Ground and UBUNTU. She is also the founder of broken beautiful press (www.brokenbeautiful.wordpress.com).

Andrea Smith is the author of *Native Americans and the Christian Right: The Gendered Politics of Unlikely Alliances*, *Conquest: Sexual Violence and American Indian Genocide*, the editor of *The Revolution Will Not Be Funded: Beyond the Non-Profit Industrial Complex*, and a coeditor of *Color of Violence: Violence Against Women of Color*. She is a co-founder of the national activist organization INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence.

Ari Wohlfeiler is from Oakland, CA. He began volunteering with Critical Resistance in 2002. In 2006, he started working at CR doing fundraising.

BO (rita d. brown) is a 60 yr old white working class butch dyke anti-authoritarian prison abolitionist who has either been in prison or working to eradicate the prison industrial complex for the last 35 years. She is a proud member of All Of Us or None and regularly works with Out of Control: Lesbain Committee to Support Women Political Prisoners and the Prison Activist Resource Center as well as many other abolitionist groups in the SF Bay Area and the world.

Dylan Rodríguez is an Associate Professor at University of California-Riverside, where he began his teaching career in 2001. His first book, *Forced Passages: Imprisoned Radical Intellectuals and the U.S. Prison Regime* was published in 2006 by the University of Minnesota Press. Among other political-intellectual collectives, he has worked with and/or alongside such organizations as Critical Resistance, INCITE! (a progressive antiviolence movement led by radical women of color, see incite-national.org), the Critical Filipino and Filipina Studies Collective

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(cfffsc.focusnow.org), and the editorial board of the internationally recognized journal *Social Justice: A Journal of Crime, Conflict, and World Order*.

Julia Sudbury is an educator, activist and writer who has been involved in the antiracist, feminist, LGBT and anti-prison movements in Britain, Canada and the U.S. for two decades. She is professor and chair of Ethnic Studies at Mills College in Oakland, and editor of *Global Lockdown: Race, Gender and the Prison-Industrial Complex* (Routledge 2005). Julia is a founding member of Critical Resistance.

Kai Lumumba Barrow is Critical Resistance's National Infrastructure Director. Kai is the former Project Director of Hunter College Student Liberation Action Movement (SLAM) and has been an active around police brutality issues and political prisoner issues since the late 70s. She currently sits on the Boards of Directors of FIERCE, LGBTSTQ youth of color organization in New York City, and INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence, a national activist organization of women of color.

Kamari Clarke was an original member of the Critical Resistance Steering committee and worked on the cultural integration of the arts component of the first Critical Resistance international conference where she coordinated the musical, spoken work, visual arts, filmic, and general creative and performative components of the conference. With a Ph.D. in Anthropology and a Master of Law, today Clarke is an associate professor of anthropology at Yale University and research scientist at the Yale Law School and continues to work on the intersections of social regulation, cultural notions of justice, and various forms of power. Over the past decade, Kamari has been the Yale faculty sponsor of the undergraduate support group for the incarcerated that provides mentor-

ing support for incarcerated men and women.

Kim Diehl is a founding member of Critical Resistance's National Organizing Body and helped launch CR South, held in New Orleans in 2003. She currently lives in her hometown, Miami, working in communications for the Service Employees International Union. She delights in writing at the beach, playing tennis year round and returning her library books on time.

Nancy Stoller, a research professor at University of California, Santa Cruz, is a long-time advocate for women prisoners and a researcher on health and health care in prison. She is currently the coordinator of the Jail and Prison Health Group of the American Public Health Association and active in the World Health Organization's Health in Prison Project.

Rachel Herzing is the CR10 Project Director at Critical Resistance.

Rose Braz was part of the founding collective of Critical Resistance and currently is the Campaign Director for CR. Rose is on the board of Justice Now and the advisory board of California Coalition for Women Prisoners. Rose also comes to this work from personal experience supporting family members who have been in prison.

Shana Agid is a writer, visual artist, and activist whose work challenges ideas of race, gender, and sexuality in the post-Civil Rights Era United States and reflects an investment in building new language to address new ideas and possibilities for undoing relationships of power in the 21st century. Shana has been working with Critical Resistance since 2000. Shana can be found/contacted at shanaagid.com.

Tamika Middleton is a Southern woman of color, mother, and all around lover of the universe. Currently, she is pursuing a M.A. in sociology from Georgia State

University. Critical Resistance has been raising her and her consciousness since 2002.

Terry A. Kupers, M.D., M.S.P. is Institute Professor at The Wright Institute, a Distinguished Life Fellow of the American Psychiatric Association and, besides practicing psychiatry at his office in Oakland, he consults to various public mental health centers and jail mental health services. He provides expert testimony as well as consultation and staff training regarding the psychological effects of prison conditions including isolated confinement in supermaximum security units, the quality of correctional mental health care, and the effects of sexual abuse in correctional settings. Dr. Kupers has published extensively, including the books *Prison Madness: The Mental Health Crisis Behind Bars and What We Must Do About It* (1999) and *Public Therapy: The Practice of Psychotherapy in the Public Mental Health Clinic* (1981). He is co-editor of *Prison Masculinities* (2002).

Vanessa Huang is a queer Chinese-American kid of immigrants from Taipei. Vanessa was the campaign director for Justice Now, an Oakland-based human rights organization that partners people in women's prisons with communities outside to build the movement for abolition, and organizes with Transforming Justice, a national coalition supporting local organizing to end the criminalization and imprisonment of transgender and gender non-conforming communities.

This piece will also be featured in the CR10 publication, Abolition Now! 10 years of Strategy and Struggle Against the Prison Industrial Complex, available through AK Press.

COMING HOME THINKING BACK, LOOKING AHEAD BY FREE

THINKING BACK

I think back on that first day I was arrested with a profound realization that I have lived a life of failure and selfishness. Never truly thinking about the consequences or the beautiful traps that the system put in place for my rather prideful and naive posterior.

It took a long time to realize my mistake that was twenty-one years in the making. Like the cool shock of cold water hitting my body – without knowledge – sending ripples reverberating up and down my spine, causing me to forget all sense of reality. I had to risk losing my freedom and sanity to finally bring myself to the inevitable conclusion.

LOOKING AHEAD

I had to CHANGE and MAKE A CHANGE. That meant facing my fears and quashing my preconceived notions about everyone and everything. I had to delete all the years of programming and conditioning placed on me, like so many others who have or are being brainwashed by mass media and institutionalization.

You can be institutionalized without being incarcerated. Before I was incarcerated, I was shocked to find my Mom beaten after drinking with my Dad, having to starve because Mom couldn't get the bills paid because welfare cut the checks off, going into bouts of depression, drug use, and prostitution, and having to be the parent forced to get money by any means necessary. Because no money meant no food.

Life wasn't always like this. I remember a simpler kind of life. Mom was healthy and she used to smile. I have learned so much in my life, but the greatest thing I learned is that I have so much more to learn. I am now doing things in my life that I never thought possible. When I was sentenced to 6-and-a-half to 15 years I felt a cloud of foreboding come upon me. I would still be inside but for the grace of God and people stepping up and calling for a change.

Upon my release I felt scared, unprepared, and lost. Nothing was the same when I came home. Everyone I knew was either gone or still inside. I had no family to speak of, which made it that much harder to adjust. With all honesty, I wanted to go back in. I was so stuck that I asked the guard

in welfare if I could get a pass to go to the bathroom. I even found myself waiting for the sound of the guard to say "chow" before I realized that I was in my own place. It got so bad that I had bouts of severe depression and thoughts of suicide. I find it funny that while I was inside I wanted so bad to get out that when I finally did, I wanted to go right back. Crazy isn't it?

I think that the only things that kept me going were my brothers and sisters in the Neta Association and my son who gave me a sense of belonging. I also had my daughter again and that doubled the necessity for a change.

I have seen my parents self-destruct with drugs and the things they did to take the pain of life away. I saw the tears, the crack pipes, and the broken promises. I lived what I saw and landed as a slave to the state. I was violated every day by the guards just so some asshole could live a little richer. They made me realize that I had to step up and stop this from happening.

So, I started to fight for change. The movement guided me on what to do to achieve my goal, which is to stop the prison industrial complex (PIC) from enslaving and destroying any more of my peoples' lives, as it damn near did mine. I know that I am not alone in this struggle against the monstrous genocidal being I call the PIC or the system. We are here fighting for that change. We are the voice where our fellow incarcerated women and men can't reach. They are us and we are them. Our experience, strength, and hope compel me to keep on fighting until every last one of our people is free.

EN LUCHA, FREE

For decades, May 1st (International Workers' Day), has been an important day for the immigrant and worker's rights movements. For the last several years in particular, this has been a day of significant street actions and marches. Shortly after this year's marches in the San Francisco Bay Area, The Abolitionist conducted a short interview with organizer Guillermina Castellanos to learn more about the significance of these actions.

Testing the Borders

Please introduce yourself and explain with which organizations you work

My name is Guillermina Castellanos and I work with the Women's Collective, a project of the Day Labor committee of La Raza Centro Legal. With the Women's Collective I work organizing Latina immigrant women toward having better lives, to have better salaries and better work for their families. I also work with St. Peter's Housing Committee, an organization that defends tenants' rights from bad housing conditions and evictions.

Could you explain the significance of May 1st to the fight for immigrant rights?

Well, we are organizing ourselves; we have awoken after September 11. Although there was already May 1, we didn't have that drive and need to defend our own rights - those of immigrants. Now our community has been more aware in regards to the rights of workers and in regards to our right to a just wage. Our people understand that May 1 is a day for the worker because of all the years, the sweat, and hands that are getting old from doing that work, they will feel that spirit of hope and of struggle to gain our dignity. We want Congress to know that our hands are getting old because we are leaving here our youth. We are leaving here our years. Many people have understood this. Many people are willing to go out in the streets to show them our situation, they've had enough of so much injustice. We have many years making our voices heard, since Cesar Chavez succeeded in creating that union to defend human rights and civil rights to gain better conditions. He has left us a great legacy and we can't let it end there. There are many legacies that have been left to us that now we are trying to instill in our youth so that those legacies will never end. So that the legacies of Cesar Chavez, Dolores Huerta, Martin Luther King, and Rosa Parks, will never stop, and so that our youth will continue with that struggle.

In the Bay Area, who has been involved in organizing the recent May 1 actions and marches?

Sometimes it's a bit confusing to name coalitions and alliances, but we have the May 1st Alliance in San Francisco with five organizations



Photo by Heba Nimr

that form it now, but we want to add more. Deporten a la Migra is a coalition with more than 20 organizations. We are forming alliances that have the same points of unity, like we are against criminalization, against evictions, against the militarization of the border. So this has helped us have more credibility with our community.

We are working strongly with Mujeres Unidas y Activas, who have 15 years defending the struggle of Latina immigrants, defending against domestic violence, and for legal rights. We work closely with CISPES (Committee in Solidarity with the People of El Salvador), who defend the rights of Salvadorans. POWER (People Organizing to Win Employment Rights) also works with us; they work for the same thing. They have many years working for the rights of workers for a decent wage. We also work with organizations of different ethnicities... Arab... Indian... Asian... African American. We also work with youth organizations and university students. I feel that we are very privileged to work with organizations that have a lot of credibility, but apart from credibility they have a lot of power to make change. These organizations have that sentiment, that power to put themselves in the shoes of the people, and that is what unites us to make great changes. I thought that Asian women did not suffer from domestic violence, that they didn't experience problems due to domestic work; that African American and Indian women did not clean houses, and I was in error, totally. When I went to the US Social Forum, I became aware that we all have the same problems and that we had to sit down together and come together to fight and make great changes.

So how are the May 1 actions and marches connected to the struggle to confront deportations and detentions?

They called me to give a presentation about immigrant rights and the legalities of immigration and asked me this question, "What do you think about when people say 'we're not criminals?'" I too used to say that we're not criminals when I used to give a talk or speech. Then someone said to me, "What do you think about

changing that we say we are not criminals and put it in another way?" And I said, "yes that's right." We cannot say that we are not criminals for one reason: because they are the ones that say we are criminals. Let me give a clear example: if I don't have documents and I need to drive out of necessity to take my child who is sick to the hospital, or because I have to go to work, it is a basic necessity in this country to drive. They won't give us an ID or license just because we are undocumented. So I go driving, and someone cuts me off and I wreck, or if unfortunately I hit a person, if I am afraid I'm going to run. I'm going to run and I'm going to leave everything there. I'm sorry, but now I have to protect myself, right?

So they make criminal what is not criminal. They are the ones who make our people criminals, and that is how I understood it because it is the truth. Simply not being documented makes you a criminal. Therefore we are not criminals, but it is also not the case that criminals are criminals: it is the law that makes people criminals. Another example is that I had a daughter who was in prison because she defended herself against domestic violence. She survived four years of domestic violence and I never knew. That caused me great pain. They made her a criminal, she was the victim, and then she was the victimizer. Because she defended herself even though she put up with four years of violence. I don't know in what moment he got her, but she defended herself and gave it to him. So then she went to prison and was there for two years, and I fought because they were going to deport her. I fought until I got her out.

The question is, these actions, these marches, all the organizations and networks that are forming: what connections are

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there between this work, the May 1 marches, and the struggle for immigrant rights?

Well, here is a great example that just occurred. This May 1 there was a big march. And then, on May 2 there were raids at restaurants here in San Francisco and throughout the Bay Area. But this is what happened: text messages began to arrive, and everyone ran to organize the people. I went to the Day Laborers and I got the women and I took them to the march. There was a connection that I had never before seen. From that May 1 march there emerged more groups and committees to make up a faster emergency call. And the people that were detained said, "we can't believe how quickly the people from the organizations mobilized to let us know that we are not alone." They themselves said, "We are not alone."

What other types of work is happening in the Bay Area around the issue of immigration?

There is another law that passed, an initiative that is very bad, which is the "gang injunction." This is of great interest to me because I have children. I have families that say, "You know what, the police arrived, just like that, knocking down our house, and my son doesn't even go to the house, but they just knocked down the door." After this law passed the police, the narcs, have gotten difficult. There is a big connection with immigration because if the child isn't documented he'll be deported.

One has to think of the children who are in this situation and are going to be affected, and even if they are not in a gang they are going to be affected by the mere act of being seen in the street or because they see them with loose pants because they want to be fashionable. Because he wants to dress in fashion does not mean that he is a killer, a hoodlum, or in a gang or whatever. And those who are in gangs are because of their situations, and I'm sure, I'd bet, put my hands in fire, that their mother does not want them to be in a gang.

I have a lady who has a son who does drugs, and he dresses like a gang member but he isn't. But because he dresses like one they are go-

ing to think he is one, and they are going to beat him up and do a lot of things to him, but he isn't. So the narcs stopped him and they found drugs on him - the drugs that he uses. Then they took him to jail and he doesn't have documents. He has a wife, and a daughter, and his mother here and he has a stepfather, but they don't have documents, so his mother couldn't go see him. The guy doesn't have anything. He doesn't have residency. He's been here since he was little, he speaks perfect English, he speaks well, but since he was young he was in youth authority because his mom worked, she's a single mom, so she hardly had any time to be with him. So you think that that Mom is at fault? She isn't at fault. It's this situation because if there were good schools, if they gave interesting curriculums, good education, with subjects that would motivate our children, they wouldn't be in the streets. I am so sure that they would not be in the street, because they would put effort into what they do. If we had well paying jobs our children would not be in the street.

You were speaking about this before when you were talking about your daughter, what are the connections between the movements for immigrant rights and also the movement confronting the prison industrial complex, policing, criminalization?

Well they have a lot to do with each other. There are a lot of examples I could give you. A working-class family - the man is working - his boss treats him badly, he gets home mad, though this is not an excuse, but if he doesn't have an alternative he begins to speak badly to his wife and then he hits her. We call the police, the police arrive and if they take him, he's going to get de-

ported. Splitting up the family. On top of that, all possibilities to arrange legal status are gone for that person. He will never be able to get documents.

What are the values and messages of all those organizations that you have been talking about and movements in regards to the issue of immigration, what are the messages that they are trying to communicate?

That militarization stop; to stop evicting; enough of the anti-immigrant attacks they are always launching against us; that we deserve to live in peace; that we need to live in dignity; that we need dignified work; that we want to be people. I want the people to be transformed, for them to see that they can make changes, that they are deserving of this country, that it is us that have made this country grow, and that this country is as it is because of our hands and our sweat, because of our health that we have left here, that they feel that they have given everything to deserve this right, and enough of all this.

My struggle is to communicate to my community what it is to rise up; that now is the time to say enough. Maybe we will not gain this for ourselves, but for those who will come after us, for our children who have to learn every day, first to have respect for each other, for women - if it is a man or a woman it's the same - and if they are gay or a lesbian, we're all humans and we all need respect.



Photo by Heba Nimr

Compassionate Release

For readers that are not familiar with compassionate release of a prisoner, I'm going to educate you. A bill was passed in January 2008 for those prisoners that have six months or less to live. The bill, AB 1539, says getting compassionate release doesn't depend on the nature of your crime or your status in life. But people ARE denied compassionate release because of their crime and their sentence. Not granting people compassionate release when they have six months or less to live and pose no threat means the sisters here die alone.

In loving remembrance of my sisters: Emma Hudson, Annie Castalogone, Shirley English, Melody Osborn. These ladies that are listed are just a small portion of those that did not get compassionate release.

MarLisa Goode

I am an incarcerated female at Central California Women's Facility. I am doing a fifteen to life sentence. I am one of the Comfort Care volunteers. My involvement came about because I was tired of my sisters dying alone.

A SYSTEM WITHIN THE SYSTEM THE PRISON INDUSTRIAL COMPLEX AND IMPERIALISM

David Gilbert

For those of us held behind locked gates within the walls and fences topped with razor wire, the “corrections” regime is the system that works tirelessly to impose total control over every aspect of our lives. Yet as ponderous and powerful as prisons are, they’re only one part, a central girder, of a much bigger and more foreboding house of horrors which can be most accurately named “imperialism.” The structural needs of the larger edifice set the specifications for the size and position of the girder; the strength of the girder helps determine how long the building will stand. We can’t understand the explosion of imprisonment in the US since 1971 without looking at imperialism’s urgent needs and goals of the period. By the same token, we can’t develop an effective program around prison industrial complex without grappling with the stresses and trends of the larger system of imperial rule.

To be clear, before you take time to read this paper, I don’t offer any brilliant ideas on strategy; those will most likely emerge from the organizing and activist efforts themselves. However, some of the concerns discussed may raise questions that go into forming strategy. I definitely look forward to learning from the dialogues that CR10 generates on these issues.

Naming the System

“Imperialism” may sound like the kind of rhetoric we want to avoid, but it’s one word that needs to be rescued as the best way to name the system that rules over us. The basis of imperialism is the relentless quest for profits around the globe. Its most striking characteristic is the colossal and grotesque polarization of wealth. That polarization happens between nations, between the rich countries of the North and the impoverished ones of the global South, such as Africa, Latin America, and parts of Asia; and at the same time within each country based on class, race and gender. The poles of dazzling wealth and abject poverty are intimately linked, as the former results from the ruthless plunder of the latter.

This system is built on and intensifies all the major forms of oppression: patriarchy, capitalism, and white supremacy, all of which are structurally central. At the same time, “imperialism” highlights the global character of the system in a way that explains why the most intense oppression and resistance have been in the South and that also provides the context for why the liberation struggles of the various peoples of color have been in the forefront within the US.

There is no way to capture what this system costs in human life and potential, the pain and the loss for all of us. Close to one billion human beings suffer chronic hunger, while another two billion face nutritional deficiencies; one billion lack access to clean drinking water. Just looking at children under the age of five, imperialism is a holocaust in progress: over 9 million die each year from easily preventable causes associated with poverty. The price for future generations may be even more severe as the rapaciousness of this global frenzy for profits threatens the very ecological basis for sustaining human life of any scale.

Since most people won’t accept living in squalor amid plenty, imperialism entails both the most sophisticated and the most brutal forms of social control. Its most salient feature is war, war after war after war, mainly

against the peoples of the global South. The domestic front-line of such repression is a truly violent and harmful prison industrial complex.

Structural Crisis and Prison Expansion

Today, 2,300,000 are held behind bars, about seven times the number in 1971. That explosion was unprecedented, coming after a seventy year period when the rates of imprisonment had remained more or less constant. This dramatic

“Imperialism may sound like the kind of rhetoric we want to avoid, but it’s one word that needs to be rescued as the best way to name the system that rules over us.”

change did not result from some sudden skyrocketing of criminal activity but rather from a radical expansion of what was designated as crimes and a draconian increase in the punishments. Such extreme measures were driven by considerations way beyond “criminal justice” and often at cross purposes to the proclaimed goal of “public safety.” These destructive changes were born from crisis, one much more severe and protracted than the periodic ups and downs of the business cycles that occur over a roughly ten year period, but rather a situation that threatened the very survival of the system. Such structural crises occur because capitalism is by its nature unstable; the economy is vast and complicated but the major decisions are made by a tiny corporate and financial elite, with each thinking only of their own profits. When a structural crisis develops, the long-term institutional arrangements that assured a reliable flow of profits and the rule of capital no longer function. One dramatic example was the Great Depression of the 1930s, followed by World War II. At the end of that period a new set of international institutions, such as the International Monetary fund (IMF) and the World Bank (WB), were created. At the same time, a new deal was hammered out for the terms of the bargain between capital and labor within the US. Those arrangements worked well for capital until they broke down a generation later. That new structural crisis, which emerged between 1968 and 1973, is the seedbed for the burgeoning prison industrial complex and many related changes in US society. The first and most obvious signs were political, as the resistance to imperialism crested in 1968. The Vietnamese were defeating what had been seen as the US military juggernaut, and national liberation struggles raged throughout the “third world”. Bugged down abroad, the rulers faced the daunting prospect of a two-front war as 125 cities at home erupted with ghetto uprisings. Militant liberation movements surged among other peoples of color within the US. These struggles inspired a series of other challenges to the system: antiwar youth became increasingly radical; the women’s liberation movement caught fire; a new environmental awareness emerged. These upheavals combined to hit capitalism where it hurts, in its bottom line. The economy was already under stress because Europe and Japan, who had been devastated in WWII, were no longer in need of massive infrastructure investments but instead produced goods that competed with US output on the world market. National libera-

tion threatened to push the prices of raw materials higher, later leading to the oil price shock of 1973 (profitable for the big oil companies but very costly for other businesses). At home, growing worker militancy, expressed in a rash of wild-cat strikes, was raising wages and benefits while the new environmental movement was imposing new costs on industry. Even the effort to co-opt the Black power movement with the top-down “War on Poverty” entailed costs in terms of taxes. To bring it all down to the bottom line, average profit rates for US business fell from a peak of 10% in 1965 to a low of 4.5% in 1974. And there was no way to simply swing out of this pit, which was only getting deeper. The healthy growth rates of the US economy from 1945 to 1970 were also cut in half for most of the ensuing decades and up through current times.

The changes brought about have been sweeping. (The nature of this crisis and its impact on the prison industrial complex is discussed at book length in Christian Parenti’s *Lockdown America*.) The response on the international level has had two main features. Economically, the battering ram was the “Third World debt crisis.” Big banks extended seemingly cheap loans to many of the poorest countries of what we now call the Global South. Most of this money was wasted on lavish luxuries and military spending by US-supported dictators, doing nothing to develop those nations’ economies. Then, the banks jacked the interest rates up so that these debts, even after payments totaling more than the original loans, just got bigger and bigger. The outstanding and unpayable debt became the basis for the IMF and WB to step in and impose “structural adjustment programs” (SAPs); about 80 of the world’s poorest counties were under their thrall by the end of the 1970s. These SAPs imposed by international finance, including a set of austerity measures, were devastating for the people in those countries. The economic justification for this cruelty is “neoliberalism,” which advocates radically reducing government help for the poor, opening up the country to foreign investment and goods, leaving social and economic decisions to the market. Of course this theory is a fraud, a pure rationalization by the dominant powers. Not one of today’s developed countries got there in this way. All relied on tariffs to protect emerging industries and used considerable government guidance for national investment priorities. But neoliberalism has been a great success . . . in ratcheting down the costs of raw materials and manufactured components produced in the global South for multinational corporations of the global North. At the same time, the major long-term political imperative has been to get the American public past its post-Vietnam reluctance to get involved in foreign wars. A series of presidents constructed a ladder of interventions, with various excuses, to take us from small, low cost aggressions to bigger ones: from teeny Grenada in 1983, to small Panama in 1989, to medium-sized Iraq and then Serbia in the 1990s. All were designed to be quick and with minimal US casualties. A main method was to rely on intense aerial bombardments despite the horrendous toll of civilian casualties, which got whitewashed as “collateral damage.” After quickly defeating Iraq’s standing army in the 1991 Gulf War, the first President

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Bush couldn't help but exult, "We've kicked the Vietnam syndrome!" His celebration was a bit premature. But later the nightmare of 9/11/01 was seized by the rulers as a golden opportunity to exploit and channel Americans' fears into support for ever more ambitious foreign adventures. Domestically a series of overlapping strategies have played out over this period. The Black struggle was the spearhead cracking open all kinds of potential for social change. So President Nixon, as his chief of staff H.R. Haldeman later recalled in his diary, "[...] emphasized that the whole problem is really the blacks. The key is to devise a system that recognizes this while not appearing to" (Parenti). The government already had a secret and illegal campaign in play which resulted in the murders of scores of Black Panthers, Native American and other activists; the fostering of bitter internal splits within radical movements; and the tying up of thousands of organizers with bogus court cases and imprisonment. (For a book length account of just part of one of these programs, COINTELPRO, see Ward Churchill and Jim Vander Wall, *Agents of Repression*). The other level was against the community as a whole, under the rubric of "law and order." Whatever the government's level of complicity, the influx of drugs that took off at this time proved very destructive to unity and focus within the Black and Latin@ communities. Then the "War on Drugs" was even more devastating. There is no way this was a well-intentioned mistake. The US had already experienced Prohibition, which showed that outlawing a drug made the price skyrocket and thereby generated lethal violence and other crimes to build and control the trade. This misnamed war was conceived to mobilize the US public behind greatly increased police powers, used to cripple and contain the Black and Latin@ communities, and exploited to expand the state's repressive power with the proliferation of Police SWAT teams, the shredding of the 4th Amendment (against unreasonable search and seizure), and the burgeoning of the imprisoned population. And as we know, an even more intense level of police state measures were imposed in the wake of 9/11/01. Even with political movements setback, the economy still stagnated in the 1970s. To boost profits capital needed to cut labor costs at home. But a direct attack on wages and benefits at home was dangerous for the rulers, who relied on political support from large sectors of the predominantly white working class to be able to wage the foreign wars so essential to the system. In the post-civil rights US explicitly racist terms had to be avoided, but the drive shaft of internal politics became a railing against criminals, welfare mothers, and immigrants, which for most whites conjure up images of Blacks, Latin@s and Asians, without being so impolite as to say that outright. To take just one small example of the dishonesty of these campaigns, the "tough on crime" politicians crusaded for cutbacks to both college classes and family visits for prisoners—the very two programs with the best proven success for reducing recidivism. Clearly the demagogues' concern wasn't to reduce crime to protect the good citizens but rather to redirect their frustrations toward those lower on the social ladder. The sad irony is that many white working class people, such as the "Reagan Democrats," were organized in this way to build the political forces who then dismantled many of the 1930s gains for labor, as unions have been crippled and many of the better-paying jobs have been outsourced.

White supremacy's companions-in-arms of patriarchy and class rule have also been enlisted in this forced march to the right. Women's independence has been undercut and the noxious flames of homophobia fanned with a hysterical "defense of the traditional family." Advocates for labor who try to hold back the rising flood waters of extreme inequality, the aggressive class warfare waged by the rich, are publicly denounced for "engaging in class warfare." All this hateful scapegoating doesn't simply divert people's view from the real, corporate sources of our problems, but also has served to consolidate the powers of the state to repress all forms of social advance.

Highly Volatile

Despite these sweeping changes and despite the severe setbacks to national liberation globally and radical movements within the US, the struggle is far from over. Imperialism has not achieved anything like the stability and the sustained economic growth rates that followed WWII. The offensive to establish solid military control of the strategic Middle East is in disarray. Despite the false economic "truisms" of respectable opinion in the North, people throughout the South see through the lie of neoliberalism, and in South America especially there are promising mass mobilizations against it. At home, unease with the US imperial mission, worry about the economy, and concern about dangerous environmental damage have become widespread.

In response to the growing discontent, some elements within the establishment want to modify the current approach. This more enlightened sector would like less of the naked militarism and unilateralism that has badly hurt the US's image abroad. Domestically, they would like the skewed social priorities to be less extreme and less glaring. Some people in government have even raised cutting back on imprisoned populations to free some funds for such pressing needs as a health coverage system in shambles.

While such shifts may create some openings, I don't think we can expect much from these forces. For one thing they're still committed to the system, and imperialism can not survive any major redistribution of wealth and power. Secondly, given that framework, the Right has had great success in shaping the debate by making certain topics totally taboo for public discussion.

Let's look at two that are particularly relevant: - Did US policies play a role in generating the hatred that led to 9/11? Even mention of such a

*"In this upside down world,
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thought evokes a tsunami of vehement and discrediting vitriol. "Nothing can justify mass killings of civilians," is certainly true. But that's not at all a reason to avoid analyzing the causes of the event, something anyone sincerely concerned about protecting civilians would be eager to do, especially as Bush rages on with policies stoking the fires of violence and hatred. The very ones who scream "nothing justifies killing 3,000" simultaneously claim that those events, and even more the documented lies about them, justify the US's killing of tens of thousands of civilians. Rational discussion absolutely must be forbidden lest we get to the core reality of imperialism. - Should we decriminalize drugs? When Presi-

dent Clinton's Surgeon General Jocelyn Elders simply suggested a study of decriminalization she was hooted off the public stage. In reality the "Drug War" has been a total failure in terms of stopping illegal drugs. Over the same 40 years, even the half-hearted public health campaign against the most-addicting drug, tobacco, has cut the rate of smoking among adults in half. The public health alternative to the violence and destruction and billions of dollars of costs of the war is so obviously sound that it can't be considered lest it eliminate a campaign so essential to the politics of racial scapegoating and the mobilizing of public support for police powers.

In this upside down world, radical alternatives, to the degree we can get them across to a large number of people, can make more sense than moderately chipping away at the dominant terms.

Imperialism has not fully regrouped, has not fully reconsolidated its rule from the turmoil and disruptions of 1968-73. Some of its very counter-offensives hold the potential for generating new shocks and crises. Bush's wars and policies in the "Middle East" seemed almost designed to ensure future attacks on Americans. The severity of environmental damage could set off more immediate disasters. Either of these problems could hurt an already shaky economy, where the gross inequality of wealth has cut into the level of consumption needed to keep it all going. The counter measure of pumping up the economy with massive infusions of debt entails the danger of making any contraction more dire, since consumers and businesses with debts to pay off won't be able to promptly put money back into consumption and production. I'm not saying that crises are necessarily imminent, the system can at times show great resilience, but the current situation is precarious.

Questions for Strategy

We need to be wary of a common Left oversimplification that economic (or other) crises automatically provide fertile soil for organizing the workers against capitalism. The stark lesson of Nazi Germany, now echoed in the trends limned above, is that an imperialist power in crisis can resort to the most fulsome racial scapegoating as a way to mobilize the majority population for imperial reconquest abroad and for total repression of dissent at home. Crises can be dangerous; they are only opportunities when we can build a visible, coherent, humane alternative. To do so we need to become a national move-

ment powerful enough to shine a bright light on the corporate greed that is the real source of our problems; we need to grow to begin to embody the possibility of cooperation, from the bottom up, as the alternative to wars, recessions, environmental destruction, and a monstrous prison industrial complex.

The global South seethes with oppression and resistance, but does not yet have as well-defined and powerful a form of struggle as the national liberation struggles seemed to offer in the '60s and '70s. Within the US we probably now have a far greater number of people engaged in ongoing organizing projects, but without yet a sense of a strong national movement that can present an alternate vision and embody new hope. As the system enters deeper crisis, or alternatively limps along with giant unresolved problems, new space may open up for us as the old ways are discredited, but we also may face mounting dangers.

To me, if we hope to build an

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Organizing For Freedom:

Resistance At Angola State Penitentiary, Louisiana's Last Slave Plantation

By Jordan Flaherty

Editor's Note: As we work to create a world without prisons, we can take inspiration from the organizing undertaken by prisoners themselves, fighting from behind prison walls for freedom and liberation. In the article below, New Orleans journalist and activist Jordan Flaherty explores the history of the Angola Three; Black Panthers who spent more than three decades in solitary confinement because the prison authorities were threatened by their actions.

At the heart of Louisiana's prison system sits the Louisiana State Penitentiary at Angola, a former slave plantation where little has changed in the last several hundred years. Angola has been made notorious from books and films such as *Dead Man Walking* and *The Farm: Life at Angola*, as well as its legendary bi-annual prison rodeo and *The Angolite*, a prisoner-written magazine published within its walls. Visitors are often overwhelmed by its size – 18,000 acres that include a golf course (for use by prison staff and some guests), a radio station, and a massive farming operation that ranges from staples like soybeans and wheat to traditional Southern plantation crops like cotton.

Recent congressional attention has again brought Angola into the media limelight. The focus this time is on the prison's practice of keeping some prisoners in solitary confinement for decades, especially two of Angola's most well-known residents – Herman Wallace and Albert Woodfox. Woodfox and Wallace are members of the Angola 3 who remain imprisoned, and are political activists widely seen as having been interned in solitary confinement as punishment for their political activism. As a result of this outside attention brought by activists and allies, new legal developments have brought Woodfox and Wallace closer to freedom.

Modern Plantation

Norris Henderson, co-director of Safe Streets/Strong Communities, a grassroots criminal justice organization in New Orleans, spent twenty years at Angola – a relatively short time in a prison where 85 percent of its 5,100 prisoners are expected to die behind its walls. “Six hundred folks been there over 25 years,” he explains. “Lots of these guys been there over 35 years. Think about that: a population that's been there since the 1970s. Once you're in this place, it's almost like you ain't going nowhere, that barring some miracle, you're going to die there.”

Prisoners at Angola still do the same work that enslaved Africans did there when it was a slave plantation. “Angola is a plantation,” Henderson explains. “Eighteen-thousand acres of choice farmland. Even to this day, you could have machinery that can do all that work, but you still have prisoners doing it instead.” Not only do prisoners at Angola toil at the same work as enslaved Africans hundreds of years ago, but many of the white guards come from families that have lived on the grounds since the plantation days.

Nathaniel Anderson, a current prisoner at Angola who has served nearly thirty years of a lifetime sentence, agrees. “People on the outside should know that Angola is still a plantation with every type and kind of slave conceivable,” he says.

Prison Organizing

In 1971, the Black Panther Party was seen as a threat to this country's power structure – not only in the inner cities, but even in the prisons.

At Orleans Parish Prison, the New Orleans city jail, the entire jail population refused to cooperate for one day in solidarity with New Orleans Panthers who were on trial. “I was in the jail at the time of their trial,” Henderson tells me. “The power that came from those guys in the jail, the camaraderie... Word went out through the jail, because no one thought the Panthers were going to get a fair trial. We decided to do something. We said, ‘The least we can do is to say the day they are going to court, no one is going to court.’”

The action was successful, and inspired prisoners to do more. “People saw what happened and said, ‘We shut down the whole system that day,’” he remembers. “That taught the guys that if we stick together we can accomplish a whole lot of things.”

Herman Wallace and Albert Woodfox were prisoners who had recently become members of the Black Panther Party, and as activists, they were seen as threats to the established order of the prison. They were organizing among the other prisoners, conducting political education, and mobilizing for civil disobedience to improve conditions in the prison.

Robert King Wilkerson, like many prisoners, joined the Black Panther Party while already imprisoned at Orleans Parish Prison. He was transferred to Angola, and immediately placed in solitary confinement (known at Angola as Closed Cell Restriction or CCR) – confined alone in his cell with no human contact for 23 hours a day. He later found out he had been transferred to solitary because he was accused of an attack he could not have committed – it had happened at Angola before he had been moved there.

In March of 1972, not long after they began organizing for reform from within Angola, Wallace and Woodfox were accused of killing a prison guard. They were also moved to solitary, where they remained for nearly 36 years, until March of this year, when they were moved out four days after a congressional delegation led by Congressman John Conyers arranged a visit to the prison. Legal experts

have said this is the longest time anyone in the US has spent in solitary. Amnesty International recently declared, “the prisoners' prolonged isolation breached international treaties which the US has ratified, including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the Convention against Torture.”

Wilkerson, Wallace, and Woodfox became known internationally as the Angola 3 – Black Panthers held in solitary confinement because of their political activism. Wilkerson remained in solitary for nearly 29 years, until he was exonerated and released from prison in 2001. Since his release, Wilkerson has been a tireless advocate for his friends still incarcerated. “I'm free of Angola,”

he often says, “but Angola will never be free of me.”

This history of struggle and resistance brings a special urgency to the case of the Angola 3. Kgalema Motlante, a leader of the African National Congress, said in 2003 that the case of the Angola 3 “has the potential of laying bare, exposing the shortcomings, in the entire US system.”

Swimming Against the Current

Wallace and Woodfox have the facts on their side. Bloody fingerprints at the scene of the crime do not match their prints. Witnesses against them have recanted, while witnesses with nothing to gain have testified that they were nowhere near the crime. There is evidence of prosecutorial misconduct, such as purchasing prisoner testimony and not disclosing it to the defense. Even the widow of the slain guard has spoken out on their behalf. Most recently, their case has received attention from Representative Conyers, head of the House Judiciary Committee, and Cedric Richmond, chair of the Louisiana House Judiciary Committee, who has scheduled hearings on the issue. In July of this year, a Louisiana Magistrate Judge issued an opinion that Woodfox was innocent and should be released. While this ruling will not lead to Woodfox's immediate release, this brings the case back to the judge overseeing the case, which could then lead to his release. Because the men were convicted on the same faulty evidence, this is also a positive development in Wallace's case.

But this is more than the story of innocent men railroaded by a system, struggling for freedom. The story of the Panthers at Angola is both inspiring and shocking. It is a struggle for justice while in the hardest of situations. “They swam against the current in Blood Alley,” says Nathaniel Anderson, a current prisoner at

Angola who has been inspired by Wallace and Woodfox's legacy. “For men to actually have the audacity to organize for the protection of young brothers who were being victimized ruthlessly was an extreme act of rebellion.”

Like many prisoners during that time, Norris Henderson was introduced to organizing by Black Panthers in pris-

on, and later became a leader of prison activism during his time at Angola. The efforts of Wilkerson, Woodfox, Wallace, and other Panthers in prison were vital to bringing improvements in conditions, stopping sexual assault, and building alliances among different groups of prisoners. “They were part of the Panther Movement,” Henderson tells me. “This was at the height of the Black power movement, we were understanding that we all got each other. In the nighttime there would be open talk, guys in the jail talking, giving history lessons, discussing why we find ourselves in the situation we find ourselves. They started educating folks around how we could treat

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Norris Henderson

We can see the ways in which a critically integrated politic is being activated through the Critical Resistance – INCITE! statement.

Since the statement has been published and circulated, it has had the following consequences:

1) Organizations and individuals that signed on to the statement had an expressed political analysis to which they could hold themselves accountable as they developed their work in the context of pressures to support the build-up of the prison system or ignore the pressing needs of rape and abuse survivors. It served as a model that other local and national organizing groups (including Critical Resistance and INCITE!) could intentionally reach for.

3) It motivated grassroots organizations to practice this cross-movement analysis by developing strategies that integrated anti-violence and PIC abolition agendas. One anti-rape organization was inspired to organize a Critical Resistance film festival in their local community, a first in the tradition of the CR film festival. Another feminist grassroots organization made a documentary on police sexual violence in their neighborhood. Other activists began to have critical conversations about how the role of foundations and non-profits help to wedge the potentially powerful solidarities between the movements.



Photo from INCITE! Archives

2) It highlighted the urgent need to create dialogue for community-based strategies to address domestic and sexual violence. Community-based alternatives for safety, support, and accountability was not a new thing, but the way the statement transformed elements of the political movements helped make clear the need to intentionally prioritize, nurture, and resource this work. Collectives and networks were inspired to develop community-based strategies to address the enormously complicated problem of gender violence.

4) It made concrete the idea that state-sponsored violence is necessarily intertwined with interpersonal violence. It helped begin to formally clarify why anti-violence activists needed to organize not only against prisons, but also police, militarism, and capitalism in order to seriously end violence in the lives of women of color and our communities. It challenged anti-violence activists to think about their work not just in the context of opening more rape crisis centers or domestic violence shelters, but how to sustainably develop a social movement that seriously addresses the root causes of violence.

The Critical Resistance-INCITE! statement has proven to be a powerful tool to help initiate organizing strategies, legitimize radical women of color and queer people of color political analysis, and provoke creative out-of-the-box ideas for movement building. CR and INCITE! also work in collaboration with many other organizations and activists who are also pushing the envelope about potential cross-movement solidarities. The historic Transforming Justice conference in October 2007, for example, created a crucial opportunity to discuss and strategize around incarceration as it relates to violence against trans and gender non-conforming folks, gender policing, and poverty. Amazing local community-based organizations across the US (and abroad) are also developing powerful ideas from critically engaging across movements by centering the experiences of folks in the margins who are articulating a necessity for this kind of cross-movement engagement and creativity.

It's a really exciting time! Radical social movements that we are building together are getting challenged and pushed to incorporate critical and potentially movement-altering agendas and practices. At the CR10 conference coming up this September, INCITE! will be working with partners and allies to push this work even further to strengthen our movements to address gender violence against transgender and gender non-conforming folks; organize to end law enforcement and immigration enforcement violence; make critical transnational partnerships as we address the links between the PIC and the military industry in the US and overseas; and work to center the complex and intersecting experiences of Native folks, undocumented immigrants, sex workers, and other criminalized women of color and trans people of color who are some of the most targeted by prisons and police. Perhaps at the next ten year anniversary, we will celebrate the ways in which these rich and transformative cross-movement collaborations have created unique and productive pathways towards liberation for all of us.

To review the CR-INCITE! Statement on Gender Violence & The Prison Industrial Complex, please visit: <http://incite-national.org/index.php?s=92>

Taxpayers File Landmark Lawsuit to Prevent \$12 Billion in Prison Construction Debt

Jeremy Bearer

SACRAMENTO – On May 6, 2008, concerned parents, students, teachers, experts and taxpayers announced the filing of their lawsuit to stop at least \$12 billion dollars of prison debt authorized by AB 900. Californians United for a Responsible Budget (CURB), a coalition of more than forty community organizations, also released an expert report exposing the true cost of AB 900.

The report by esteemed economist Dr. Adam Werner, a principal in the Securities Practice at CRA International, details the waste and financial inefficiency of AB 900. According to Werner, “The use of lease-revenue bonds to finance these facilities is irrational from a purely economic perspective given the cost differential between using lease revenue and general obligation bonds.”

Werner calculates the unnecessary costs to total an additional \$2 billion in interest payments and the total cost to taxpayers of borrowing \$7.4 billion is at least \$12 billion and opines that an entity that chooses lease-revenue financing must be motivated primarily by concerns other than economic efficiency. Dr. Werner writes, “One possibility is that lease revenue bonds are used to finance prisons because state officials believe that voters would reject the use of general obligation bonds for the projects in question.”

The landmark lawsuit filed against a number of state officials, including the Governor, the State Treasurer and the Chairman of the Department of Finance, argues that AB 900 constitutes an illegal bypass of voters’ constitutional right to vote on debt (California Constitution Article XVI, section 1) and an illegal waste of scarce government resources (Code of Civil Procedure section 526a).

“In the midst of a wrenching budget crisis, California is borrowing billions of dollars to build 53,000 new prison and jail beds,” commented Lead Counsel in the CURB lawsuit, Thomas Nolan. “How can we be kicking thousands of kids off of Medi-Cal and cutting the public school budget by billions, yet sink \$12 billion into building tens of thousands of new prisons beds?”

Dubbed by the New York Times as the largest prison construction plan in US history, AB 900 was passed last year with no public hearing, no public debate, and with public opinion squarely against new prison construction. Dorsy Nunn, a plaintiff in the suit and a member of All of Us or None, explains that “AB 900 is in direct violation of the California Constitution, which demands that only the will of the voters can put the General Fund into this kind of debt.”

“It speaks so sadly of our future that my teachers are receiving lay off warning notices at

the same time 53,000 new prison beds are being funded,” said Ericka Sokolower-Shain, one of the plaintiffs who is a public school student. Additional plaintiffs are Camilla Chavez of Bakersfield’s Dolores Huerta Foundation, Bonnie Long, who has a family member in prison, and Cynthia Chandler, parent of public school students.

“California has opened 23 new prisons in the past 23 years, and our system is more crowded than ever,” explains CURB member Craig Gilmore. “By building more prisons, we’re making the overcrowding problem even worse. The real solutions to overcrowding are early release, parole reform, sentencing reform and full implementation of Proposition 36.” Chair of the Senate Public Safety Committee, Senator Gloria Romero, has repeatedly stated that “we cannot build ourselves out of the prison crisis.”

In a March letter to the State Public Works Board, Chair of the Democratic Caucus Carole Migden, who will appear at the press conference, wrote, “Due to the State’s current financial crisis, I do not think it is fiscally prudent to authorize the sale of lease revenue bonds which will increase the state’s current structural deficit.” The ongoing costs of AB900 will likely devastate the state budget for years to come.

NEWS BRIEFS

BY ROSE BRAZ

CALIFORNIA INITIATIVE UPDATES: WHAT WILL AND WON'T BE ON THE NOVEMBER BALLOT.

It's that time again, the November election is fast approaching. Here's a quick round up of the main criminal justice initiatives out there and where they are.

Three Strikes: There were two attempts to put measures on the November ballot to change California's draconian three strikes law, neither one of them obtained the required number of signatures.

Proposition 5 (NORA): The Non-violent Offender Rehabilitation Act of 2008 or NORA would make changes to Proposition 36 and within the bureaucracy of the California Department of Corrections.

NORA would expand some treatment options to youth, but the biggest changes would come in administration of Prop 36. NORA would alter Prop 36 to establish three levels of treatment:

- Track I, much like the current Prop 36, provides treatment in "nonviolent" drug possession cases, with a plea suspended during treatment. Defendants who do not complete treatment go to Track II.
- Track II, a modified version of Prop. 36, provides for treatment after a conviction. A longer treatment period is possible (up to 24 months) and graduated sanctions are permitted upon the first probation violation; people can be sent to jail at later stages. People who do not complete the program successfully can be sentenced to county jail or transferred to Track III.
- Track III encompasses all current adult drug court programs for adults, and expands those court programs by more than doubling funding. Eligibility for Track III is discretionary with the judge, but persons with 5 arrests in the previous 30 months, would be automatically placed in Track III, instead of Track II.

NORA also makes several changes to the prison system. NORA would create: a new position within CDCR, Secretary of Rehabilitation and Parole, who would be appointed by the Governor; a Division of Parole Policy, Programs and Hearings, which would include the Board of Parole Hearings and the Adult Parole Operations Authority; a Division of Research for Recovery and Re-entry Matters; and a Parole Reform Oversight and Accountability Board which would review, direct and approve the implementation of the programs and policies provided for under NORA.

NORA also would direct the Governor to appoint a Chief Deputy Warden for Rehabilitation for each of the state prisons and require CDCR to annually host an international conference on rehabilitation.

Prisons would be required to provide rehabilitation programs to everyone not less than 90 days before release and CDCR would be required to pay for rehabilitation programs for all

parolees and for former parolees, who could request services for up to one year after discharge.

People whose convictions are classified as "nonviolent" (with no prior strikes, no prior sex offenses requiring registration) would be able to earn time off their sentences with good behavior and by participating in rehabilitation programs. Parole periods for those who qualify would be limited to between 6-12 months, compared with up to 3 years under current law, with earlier discharge upon completion of a rehabilitation program.

Proposition 6 (The Runner Initiative): State Senator George Runner is at it again, this time proposing what he is calling the "Safe Neighborhoods Act." According to the Ella Baker Center who is organizing a statewide coalition in opposition, the Runner initiative would cost billions for more prisons, jails, and law enforcement and increase incarceration rates, especially among young persons from communities of color. In particular, the measure increases state funding for police, sheriffs, district attorneys, jails, and probation officers primarily for law enforcement activities, allocating monies for:

Monetary awards to obtain information on crimes;

The construction and operation of county jails; Juvenile facility repair and renovation and the operation of probation supervision and recreational programs for youth;

Centers to assist investigations into child abuse and to assist survivors;

Task forces that would target those involved in gang activity, focus on narcotics interdiction at the state border, or to search "high-risk" probationers for guns;

Providing information and other assistance to victims of crimes;

Running criminal background checks on individuals receiving federal Section 8 housing assistance vouchers; and

Electronic devices to track people convicted of "violent" offenses or those involved in gangs and sex crimes.

The measure increases criminal penalties, specifically targeting "gang-related" crimes, intimidation of individuals involved in court proceedings, possession and sale of methamphetamines, vehicle theft, removing or disabling a GPS device, and firearms possession. The measure would also establish a statewide gang registry, change hearsay rules making hearsay admissible in more situations, alter gang injunction procedures, allow for the use of temporary jails,

and bar the release of undocumented persons arrested for "violent" or "gang-related" crimes.

Proposition 9 (Marsy's Law): Marsy's Law is a disaster in waiting and is largely being bankrolled by almost \$5 million from Henry Nicholas III, who funded the campaign against Prop. 66 (the last major attempt to amend CA's Three Strikes law). In brief, it would 1) change the legal rights of crime victims and restitution; 2) place restrictions on early release; and 3) alter parole policies. The law would require restitution be ordered in every case in which there is a loss and that any funds collected go to pay that restitution first, prioritizing those payments over other fines and obligations legally owed. It would require victims be notified not only of sentencing and parole hearings but also other types of proceedings, including release from custody. The Constitution would also be changed to specify that the safety of a crime victim must be taken into consideration by judges in setting bail and to specify that criminal sentences shall not be substantially diminished by early release policies to alleviate overcrowding. In regard to parole, the law would change the procedures of the board when it considers the release of people serving a life sentence. Specifically, if you are denied parole you would generally have a longer time to wait, in some cases up to 15 years, before you would have another parole consideration hearing. And finally, the law would make changes to the revocation procedure for people paroled after the enactment of this initiative – establishing longer deadlines for probable cause hearings and would only provide legal counsel to people facing revocation on a case-by-case basis if the person is deemed indigent, their case is complex, or they are incapable of defending themselves because of a mental or educational incapacity.

GOVERNOR FAILS TO PUSH AND THEN DROPS PLAN FOR EARLY RELEASES

Governor Schwarzenegger dropped his proposal to release about 22,000 people from prison before they complete their terms. The proposal was part of his January 2008 proposed budget, but after he failed to push legislators on it and the legislature itself failed to push the proposal, the Governor dropped the idea from his revised May budget. The Governor's plan for summary parole, discussed in the last issue of the Abolitionist, still remains in the budget but so far does not appear to be moving forward in the legislature. Under summary parole someone who is found to have violated parole for certain things would not be returned to prison.

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Vicissitudes: In Memoriam

Marilyn Buck

FCI Dublin, CA

Two men died this spring. They both leave behind a legacy of clarity and vision of the deepest sense, and actions of humanity, internationalist solidarity, and national liberation for all oppressed nations, particularly Africa and the African Diaspora of which they are descendents. Both men's words and deeds have affected my life, even my liberation as a woman. No people will truly be liberated until women worldwide – the majority of the world – achieve independence and equality.

The elder, Aimé Césaire, was a combative thinker, writer, and artist who, along with his comrade writer-thinker wife, Suzanne Roussi, and others of the African Diaspora birthed the Negritude Movement: an affirmation of the beauty and brilliance of Africa and African people in Diaspora and their right to independence and self-determination; an illumination through the arts and culture of possibility and imagination to write and create that necessary world waiting to be restored.

The younger, a son and student, was

Qwusu Yaki Yakuba, who as a still uneducated, though brilliant youth spent nearly 40 years in Illinois prisons. He became not only a dedicated revolutionary in the footsteps of Malcolm X, but also a deep political thinker and founding editor of several journals that gave voice to New African political prisoners, prisoners of war, and other voices of liberation worldwide. As an Internationalist, he consciously struggled against women's oppression, particularly of Black women in the US. Despite long captivity in the toxic environment of reinforced male supremacy, Yaki understood that failures in other struggles to keep the promise of women's equality and liberation must not be repeated here (from a Biography by Nancy Kurshan and Steve Whiteman).

Both these men were activists: theory and practice, both essential to advance the liberation project. We would all do well to carry on in their spirit. Especially in these times of a crumbling, but still desperately voracious empire that feeds off bodies, lands, and resources, from Iraq and Afghanistan, all around the world and back here inside its belly—in its acid-battered working, oppressed communities that provide bodies for its torturous, deadly prisons.

Meanwhile, the election campaign is in full swing, money is being poured into propaganda machinery—advertising/media corporations. None of those millions are going

into social programs. None of the blather addresses prisons, not even the most visible of all—Guantanamo, the current pinnacle of the depraved torture and prison industrial complex. Prisoners are “non-issues,” issued only a number and a slab in the cell. With as many prisoners as there are here in the US, why is that?

Many organizations and groups speak out against racism and national and class oppression along with degradation and dehumanization of prisoners that propel US prison systems. What should we, the prisoners do? Who can take more active responsibility to support this struggle?

It is incumbent upon us to overcome our sense of powerlessness, victimization, and the trauma of life in this state of repression. Every prisoner should be writing someone in their families and communities to encourage them to speak up and challenge the existence of the prison industrial complex. If the candidates are deaf and blind and refuse to speak, then expose them. To do so will not only build our movement, but will fuel our growth and transformation. Who doesn't need to learn from her or his circumstances, errors, and shortcomings?

Write and organize your family and community! Each one of us should become a voice of justice, dignity, and human liberation. If we don't, who will?

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effective national movement we must directly challenge the attacks on immigrants, prisoners, and welfare recipients—not only as a matter of fundamental justice, but also because these arenas are crucial for blunting the strategic spearhead for right-wing mobilization. If we can confront those attacks and turn them around, we will take a big step toward setting new terms for political debate and change. The prison industrial complex constitutes a sobering aspect of the problem. Of course the PIC has nowhere near the economic size and political clout of its big brother, the military industrial complex. Nonetheless, now significant vested interests have been created who are all-too-ready to be a spark plug for the larger political engine of racial scapegoating.

At the same time, we don't have a chance of abolishing the PIC without opposing imperialism. The warfare and the security states go together and totally reinforce each other. We've seen this with a terrible vengeance in the post-9/11 world, where the isolation and torture of US prisons have been brought into play for a pivotal role in the “war on terror,” which in turn has been used to ram through outrageous increases of police powers and denials of civil liberties, coming down hardest on the oppressed but in place as a raised club threatening anyone who challenges the powers that be. If we don't challenge the larger system, the PIC remains on a solid foundation.

In short, we're likely to face a very challenging period ahead with great opportunities and dangers. Taking on the scapegoating of prisoners and others is essential to any success for the left; an anti-imperialist framework and effort is crucial to any qualitative advance for prison industrial complex abolition.

In this situation there are a host of other questions for strategy. How can we bring a consciousness and liberatory politics about all the main pillars of the system—race, class, gender, and sexuality—into our daily work around specific issues? How can we transform ourselves around all these fundamentals while still pouring our energy into organizing and activism? How can we work from and advance a truly radical analysis and still reach out to large numbers of people? While there are as of yet no pat answers, CR organizers and others are doing invaluable work in consciously grappling with these and related issues in practice. I salute those front-line efforts. Let's all continue to move forward in a completely open-minded and full-hearted way.

David Gilbert has been a prisoner in New York State since 1981. A collection of his writings, No Surrender, is available from AK Press.

This piece will be featured in the CR10 publication, Abolition Now! 10 years of Strategy and Struggle Against the Prison Industrial Complex, available through AK Press.

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each other. The Nation of Islam was growing in the prison at the same time. You had these different folk bringing knowledge. You had folks who were hustlers that then were listening and learning. Everybody was coming into consciousness.”

Insatiable Machine

The US has the largest incarcerated population in the world – twenty-five percent of the world's prisoners are here. If Louisiana, which has the largest percentage imprisoned of any US state, were a country, it would have by far the world's largest percentage of its population locked up, at one out of every 45 people. Nationwide, more than seven million people are in US jails, on probation, or on parole, and African Americans are incarcerated at nearly ten times the rate of whites. Our criminal justice system has become an insatiable machine – even when crime rates go down, the prison population keeps rising.

The efforts of the Angola 3 and other politically conscious prisoners represented a fundamental challenge to this system. The organizing of Wallace, Woodfox, and Wilkerson, though cut short by their move to solitary, had an effect that continues to this day.

Prison activism, and outside support for activists behind bars, can be tremendously powerful, says Henderson. “In the early 1970s people started realizing we're all in this situation together. First, at Angola, we pushed for a reform to get a law library. That was one of the first conditions to change. Then, we got the library; guys became aware of what their rights were. We started to push to improve the quality of food, and to get better medical care. Once they started pushing the envelope, a whole bunch of things started to change. Angola was real violent then, you had prisoner violence and rape. The people running the prison system benefit from people being ignorant. But we educated ourselves. Eventually, you had guys in prison proposing legislation.”

This was a time of reforms and grassroots struggles happening in prisons across the US. Uprisings such as the Attica Rebellion were resulting in real change. Today, many of the gains from those victories have been overturned, and prisoners have even less recourse to change than ever before. “Another major difference,” Henderson explains, is that “you had federal oversight over the prisons at that time, someone you could complain to, and say my rights are being violated. Today, we've lost that right.” Abolitionists argue that this proves that reforms can be taken away, and our struggle must be for an end to prisons.

Working for criminal justice is work that benefits us all, says Henderson. Instead of investing in more prisons, “we should start investing in the redemption of people.” After decades of efforts by their lawyers and by activists, Wallace and Woodfox have been released from solitary, and the positive developments in their legal battles have brought hope to many. However, Wallace and Woodfox remain behind bars, punished for standing up against a system that has grown even larger and more deadly. And the abuse does not end there. “There are hundreds more guys who have been in [solitary] a long time too,” Henderson adds. “This is like the first step in a thousand-mile journey.”

Jordan Flaherty is an editor of Left Turn Magazine (www.leftturn.org). Most recently, his writing can be seen in the new anthology Red State Rebels, released by AK Press. He can be reached at neworleans@leftturn.org. A version of this article was featured in the Summer 2008 issue of Left Turn Magazine.

Submit to *The Abolitionist*!

The Abolitionist wants to hear from you! Do you have questions about abolition, strategies to advocate for prisoners, or useful resources? News or ideas about imprisonment, policing, surveillance or other aspects of the punishment system? Write us!

We accept: -Short Articles (1500 words)
-Letters (250-500 words)
-Reproducible artwork (highly desired!)

Our criteria for pieces in *The Abolitionist* are listed below. Please note that we edit all submissions for content, length, and clarity. If you do not want your piece edited, include a note with your submission indicating that no changes should be made. Please also know that requests for no editing may result in your piece not being printed. Also, let us know how you would like to sign your piece. You can sign however you wish: your full name and address, initials and city, or anonymously.

We do our best to respond to everyone, but because of the volume of mail we receive, we will not be able to respond to or publish every submission.

If you are interested in being involved with *The Abolitionist*, let us know! Please forward us family and friends' mailing and e-mail addresses that would like to receive or support *The Abolitionist*. Contributions, submissions, and stamps can be sent to:

The Abolitionist, c/o Critical Resistance; 1904 Franklin St. Suite 504; Oakland, CA 94612

Criteria for Submissions:

We have updated our guidelines to be more specific about what we print in the *Abolitionist*. We hope for pieces that are politically engaged in the theories, strategies, and visions of abolition, generate dialogue and debate with our readership, and are action-oriented.

So please keep writing and submitting, and please follow these new and improved guidelines—taken in part from our *Abolitionist Organizing Toolkit*, which is free to all people in prison, jails, and other forms of detention.

In Struggle, The Abby Collective

Critical Resistance's Mission is to build an international movement to end the Prison Industrial Complex by challenging the belief that caging and controlling people makes us safe. We believe that basic necessities such as food, shelter, and freedom are what really make our communities secure. As such, our work is part of global struggles against inequality and powerlessness. The success of the movement requires that it reflect communities most affected by the PIC. Because we seek to abolish the PIC, we cannot support any work that extends its life or scope.

Critical Resistance's vision is the creation of genuinely safe, healthy communities that do not rely on prisons and policing to respond to harm. We call our vision "abolition." We take the name "abolitionists" purposefully from those who called for the abolition of slavery in the 1800s. Abolitionists believed that slavery could not be fixed or reformed - it needed to be abolished. We believe that prison is not an answer to drug addiction, poverty, or the harms our communities suffer. This system of locking people in cages cannot be fixed or reformed; it must be abolished.

The end goal of abolition is to reduce harm in our communities by creating lasting alternatives to punishment and prisons, investing in the things that truly build safe communities such as education, housing, and employment, thus eliminating the "need" for the prison industrial complex. Organizing against the PIC is as much about building something as it is about fighting what is destroying our communities. Our organizing is also an ongoing effort to create alternatives, not only to imprisonment, but to the culture of punishment with which we've become familiar.

Engaged with Abolition

Pieces should:

Include questions, challenges, and hopes for the abolition of the prison industrial complex as both a goal and a strategy. This means we want pieces to critically engage issues pertaining to getting rid of prisons, policing, surveillance, courts, punishment, prison expansion, industry connections, and other tenets of the PIC as an end goal, as well as a means to make short-term work against it connect to long-term struggles. For example, the suggestions and ideas for change in the piece should not be changes/reforms we may have to fight against later.

★Reject the PIC everywhere, not just in one instance, neighborhood, for certain people at the expense of other people, or for certain circumstances.

★Language we use should challenge commonly accepted notions of safety, justice, and accountability. Instead of relying on language that power holders within the PIC use, we should be creating our own. Instead of using words like "inmates" and "criminals" or "felons", try "prisoners" and "former prisoners"; instead of "crime", try "harm" and/or "violence" to identify the act instead of using the state's words that are applied to many things, some of which do not cause harm; and instead of perpetrator try "the person who caused harm/violence."

★Take on aspects of the PIC that are most harmful, including structural forces like white supremacy, class oppression and capitalism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, ableism, and others—both within the PIC and in our groups (friends, families, etc.) and work.

★Finally, pieces do not have to explicitly be abolitionist or about abolition, but should attempt to engage in the above politics of abolition.

Engaged with Readers, Past Issues, and Further Work

Pieces should:

★Pose questions to the readership, suggesting involvement in the conversation that a piece starts or continues from past issues. Examples include: asking for feedback, asking for others' experiences, and encouraging further exploration of ideas and strategies—essentially encouraging readers to talk with each other, do their own research, and/or reply.

★Call readers to action, whether through the above or through a list at the end of a piece with possible folks to call, next steps for continuing the work, ways to use the information provided in the piece to organize and as a tool for the empowerment and self-determination of readers and our communities.

★Suggest or call for the creation of workable ways to maintain self-determination, meaningful safety (freedom from interpersonal harm as well as the harms of poverty, homelessness, lack of accessible health care, joblessness, insubstantial wages, collective/community health, etc.) You don't have to know the answers but the piece should be inquisitive, thoughtful, and engaging in the visions and possibility of a PIC-free world.

General Writing Guidelines

We care about pieces being coherent. There should be a clear beginning (setting up the thesis or main points/arguments), middle (developing and supporting main points/arguments) and end (drawing connections and conclusions, and suggesting next steps). Try writing an outline before first writing the piece, or try saying it out loud to yourself and writing what you say. The piece needs to be clear, so have a friend or two read it before it gets sent in, or read it out loud to yourself to check for clarity and coherency. Please also review for spelling and grammar, although a copy editor can work with you to edit these things as well.

★We hope to print a range of pieces—letters, creative writing like fiction and poetry, dialogues, interviews, essays, biographies, obituaries, etc.

★We will not accept appeals for money, legal support, or publicity that do not include the above content as a part of a larger discussion or analysis.

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was thankful for the outside allies' support, but needed to test the bounds of its newly won power and demonstrate it could fulfill its union mandate. The NPRA negotiated hard with Ken Bishop, the interim warden, and got all their demands met, including civilian observers and classification hearings for all men in segregation, in exchange for going back to work. Bishop immediately fell into bad grace with the guards.

The prisoners at Walpole demanded that Boone grant access to civilian observers to check the guards' hostility and willful neglect of duties. Rodman met with Boone to discuss the stabilizing effect "well-trained observers" could have on both the prisoners and guards. Boone gave the green light. Rodman turned to a "small group of committed volunteers who became the core of the AHC's Observer Program."

Among them were John McGrath, who had recently been released, and Arnie Coles from the external NPRA, Russ Carmichael and John Ramos from Ex Cons Helping Others, John Osler, a divinity student, Obalaji Rust from the Black United Front, Douglas Butler, a labor organizer from the Black community, Frank Kelly from Packard Manse, and David Dance, the Harvard student running the Black history course at Walpole.

The Observer Program started March 8, 1973, on the heels of the Kwanzaa lockdown. The observers were viscerally exposed to the "inhuman depravity" the prisoners lived and died under. "Broken windows, human defecation on the floor, 4 feet of trash in the corridor and open fires in inmates cells represent a general lack of control," reported one observer.

On March 9, fifty guards walked off the job leaving the prison in the hands of the civilian observers and the prisoners. "Boone The Coon" was the headline in the *Herald* that day. The guards' union released a statement saying they were disturbed by Boone's interference in running the prison. The liberal white north had been unmasked, revealing the ugly face of overt racial hatred," Bissonnette asserts.

"When the guards went on strike, we were prepared. We had everything in place," recalls Dellelo. The NPRA set up a committee system to run the hospital, kitchen, industries, and sports recreation. They got control over the canteen and

used its profits to reinvest in NPRA initiatives. They wanted to open NPRA halfway houses that employed guys upon release. Boone negotiated with private industries to provide training and jobs prisoners could keep when they got out.

The prisoners were testing their model of self-determination and self-government. Solomon Brown developed a curriculum that was both practical and meaningful for BANTU and the NPRA that taught prisoners basic reading, writing, and math based in an examination of their own experiences.

The prisoners also developed a structure to replace the arbitrary disciplinary system used by the guards. The prisoners took on creating a code of behavior they could agree to as well as a way of settling disputes among themselves. "The NPRA proved quite adept at developing accepted rules. Its code was founded on the principle of idealized brotherhood: 'we are all brothers. Don't do anything that you would not do to your brother.' This included theft, assault, and murder. During this time, Ralph Hamm and Larry Rooney took responsibility for teaching this code to the general population," notes Bissonnette.

"When the guards went out on strike, they expected the prison to explode. And we held it together. It was peaceful in there. There was no tension in the prison. As soon as the guards came back, all the tension came back with them. The guards started where they left off. The thing is, the guards weren't going to let Boone succeed. The guards were totally embarrassed because we showed that the prison could run without them and they had to destroy that," explains Dellelo. During the three months the NPRA controlled the prison there were no murders, rapes, or assaults.

Meanwhile, the US economy staggered toward a paralyzing recession. Job competition was fierce. Nixon reinstated the death penalty. Conservatism was on the rise. Under these ominous signs, the guards returned to Walpole. Boone called for a phased return of the guards after they went through a "retraining program." But enough "trouble guards" returned to sabotage the peace.

The NPRA knew their time was running out. In May 1973, they again pressed the State Labor Relations Committee (SLRC) for union recognition. The SLRC already notified DOC attorney Robert Bell they wouldn't

certify, but withheld a public announcement. Bissonnette notes, "Hamm expected the NPRA would lose some, if not all, of its liberty, but he hoped that SLRC recognition would preserve the prisoners' union's framework and ability to secure its members' rights."

Boone became prisoner to political pressure and the need to prove he was in charge. He reckoned if he could orchestrate a smooth transition of power back to the DOC he could get "back in the game." He formed a task force to take back the prison. A full shakedown was scheduled for May 21.

Boone left town for a visit. Joe Higgins, as acting commissioner, moved on the prisoners. He sent out a memo that said the prison would be locked down for 2 days and the pass system would be reinstated to control prisoner movement. This caught the NPRA off guard and threw the general population into a panic. They called for a full meeting in the auditorium and Dellelo cautioned calm, as any violence would be used to justify a state police takeover.

Walter Waitkevich, Walpole's newly appointed warden, said a full shakedown was necessary to secure a safe work place for the returning guards. He was following a script. Outside, the *Herald* spread rumors about a firebomb. Civilians were told to leave the prison. "All the prisoners, including Dellelo, returned to their cells and closed their own doors manually. A short time later, the state police walked out of the galleries and onto the flats. Dressed in riot gear, they patrolled the corridors. Dellelo could hear some men being taken from their cells; then he heard the beatings begin. After they removed the prisoners, the police entered the empty cells and threw the prisoners' personal belongings out onto the flats," explains Bissonnette.

Dellelo was beaten to a pulp and put in punitive segregation to "make sure his supporters would not see how badly he was injured and to ensure that he could not reorganize the NPRA until the state police had won complete control of the prison and reinstated the guards," states Bissonnette. Other leaders met a similar fate. The NPRA's prison office was ransacked and their files were removed from the prison. In the weeks that followed, Waitkevich rescinded the NPRA's "official standing within the prison" and instituted new regulations to control prisoners' movements and activities. Sargent fired Boone in late June 1973.

According to Ralph Hamm, "*When the Prisoners Ran Walpole* undermines PIC security because it promotes unity amongst diverse groups of people, defines prisoners as a class of laborers, explains prisoner slave status under the Thirteenth Amendment to the US Constitution, encourages community oversight of corrections and community-based corrections, exposes institutional racism as something to strive against, encourages self-help programs and organizing, and promotes the end to ethnic, cultural, and class violence; and, the book encourages non-violent organizational resistance to repression. In other words, the book speaks against everything the PIC stands for."

The prisoners at Walpole were eventually dispossessed of their union, but refuse to be dispossessed of their memory. If you listen, you'll hear the beating heart of their history tapping out, "And what will you do?"

Part II of this series will explore the legacy and lasting contributions of the Walpole Experiment, and begin to engage the critical question, "What is to be done?"

***When the Prisoners Ran Walpole*, is available through South End Press (see Resource Section for contact information).**

Critical Condition

Dearest Abolitionist Readers,

For the last two and a half years, I have tried to offer some practical and useful health information from an abolitionist perspective in the Critical Condition column. This fall, I will be beginning medical school in Boston, and while I will continue to work with Critical Resistance and do health work with current and former prisoners, I will be unable to continue writing Critical Condition alongside my studies. Sarah, a longtime Critical Resistance member, will take over the column. Sarah just finished an intensive study in public health at San Jose State and has been researching the health needs of older women in prison with the Older Prisoner Project at Legal Services for Prisoners with Children.

It has been an honor and a pleasure writing for *The Abolitionist*. Thank you to everyone who has written me with questions, feedback, and encouragement. You can send your questions and comments to Sarah at the same address: Critical Condition c/o Critical Resistance 1904 Franklin St, Suite 504, Oakland, CA 94612.

*Yours for a practice of abolitionist healthcare,
With love and solidarity,
liz*

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POPULATION CAP LAWSUIT SETTLEMENT NOT POSSIBLE

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 20

Following negotiations, it appears that the lawsuit that could cap the number of people in California prisons will not be settled outside of trial. Newspapers reported that a settlement that would reduce the number of people who return to prison on violations of parole was on the table. People found in violation of parole could be given treatment and confined locally, including in home detention and by electronic monitoring. The proposal would establish additional good time for people earning degrees, completing substance abuse programs or meeting other benchmarks.

The settlement left open the number of people California would be permitted to imprison with that number to be determined later by a panel of "experts." The state would have until the end of 2011 to meet the population target. Donald Specter, director of the Prison Law Office, told the Los Angeles Times, he would have preferred that the state reduce overcrowding earlier than in the proposed settlement.

As we went to print, settlement negotiations had not resulted in an agreement from all parties and the case has been set for trial to begin November 17, 2008.

cut out and mail to: The Abolitionist c/o Critical Resistance, 1904 Franklin St, suite 504; Oakland, CA

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