The prison industrial complex is a maze of laws and rules and regulations and policies and procedures. For most of us, navigating the systems of policing, surveillance, imprisonment, detention, and death that help keep the prison industrial complex in place and make it strong is difficult. We look for explanations, answers, and strategies to make sense of its entangling web. And then, it seems, as soon as we think we know something, the rules change.

But the system is meant to be dizzying. Those people and institutions invested in maintaining the prison industrial complex want it to seem complicated and too hard to understand. They suggest explanations and explorations that keep us on journeys through the system that not only expose their histories and legacies, but also suggest strategies to be used today to begin to break down the system both from outside and within.

While even collectively these pieces don’t suggest some concrete roadmap for change, they do move us steps closer to understanding the situation we’re in. They also echo strongly the need to stay focused on the elimination of this system designed to confuse, frustrate, and hurt us.

Finally, this edition of The Abolitionist is dedicated to the late John Bowman who is memorialized in these pages. He was a teacher and inspiration to many of us, and his influence continues even now that he’s gone. As the struggle to free the San Francisco 8 continues, John is continually in our thoughts and his memory pushes us forward.

Please don’t forget that we want to hear from you. Conversations across walls are at the heart of this newspaper. If you have writing or artwork or ideas to share, please send them on to us. While we can’t promise that we’ll print everything we get, we’ll do our best to stay in conversation with you as we continue in solidarity and struggle.

By Isaac Ontiveros


In 1973, as part of the U.S. government’s COINTELPRO operations, John along with two others endured days of brutal torture while being held by New Orleans Police. 35 years later, John (along with four other comrades) was jailed once again for refusing to cooperate with a grand jury orchestrated by the same forces that had been involved in his torture and that had done so much to crush the movement a generation previous.

Upon release John joined his fellow sisters in forming the Committee for the Defense of Human Rights and traveled across the country speaking about his own story but also drawing the connections between torture in US prisons and at such places as Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo; the continuity of COINTELPRO and the PATRIOT Act; and the relationship between the state’s war against dissent domestically and its raging militarism worldwide.

Had John Bowman lived only a month longer, he would have no doubt found himself locked up alongside the SF8, once again resisting the state that had hunted him for half his life. The legacy of John Bowman is that of a committed activist, organizer, and fighter whose work was rooted in local community while maintaining a view for the global—truly embodying the irrepressibility of the struggle for freedom.
Critical Resistance: Can you talk about how the Quakers have walked that thin line between taking stands against horrific conditions of confinement and also holding prison abolition as the overarching goal?

Laura Magnani: Well, most Quakers are not prison abolitionists, just as most Quakers were not slavery abolitionists although we don't remember that now. We weren't pleased with the results we saw from Struggle for Justice when indeterminate sentencing ended but mandatory sentences came in. We had to take a close look at how to recommend change that's not going to end up being worse than what you're abolishing. So we set forth in [Beyond Prisons] some principles so we are constantly examining our advocacy tactics and don't fall into that trap.

One of those tactics is to do no harm. The interim steps we recommend wouldn't be, for instance to include building more prisons so we have more room for rehabilitation, which is exactly what the Governor is proposing now. We aren't going to abolition, certainly, but we're not going to even reduce the prison population by building new prisons no matter how much we claim we'll be doing something rehabilitative. [Doing] something rehabilitative on the outside would be an incremental step.

The second principle is to examine the proposed incremental step to see if it genuinely moves in the direction of dismantling the system rather than bolstering it up. An example of that is watching ways in which restorative justice language is appropriated as an add-on to the retributive system. People are getting out with restitution debts to the name of restorative justice, which then becomes just another punishment or obstacle to their starting a new life.

There are also positive principles we advocate. The proposal needs to embody greater fairness, more democratic processes, more individual autonomy and greater overall social and economic justice. Those are the standards we are looking for as we come up with steps towards abolition.

Critical Resistance: How do you hope people will use this book?

Laura Magnani: First we hope people will pay serious attention to the analysis itself. We have to [look] at this issue through a social, racial, and economic lens. The history of the prison system is the history of racism in this country and people need to take that extremely seriously.

Number two, we hope people will examine our assumptions about punishment; some of the philosophical, ethical underpinnings that keep this [system] going whether they make any sense or not. [We hope] people will start examining their own assumptions about punishment.

We come into issues of punishment from our own histories and experiences. The prison system is taking that punishment model and applying it without examining if it's giving us any of the results we're hoping for. There are a lot of moral, religious and philosophical assumptions that need to be examined.

We do a critique of the restorative justice movement, which could represent a new paradigm, because restorative justice is based on a healing model rather than a revenge and punishment model. The question is, are we applying it as a new paradigm or are we applying it on top of the retributive system so that it just becomes another sanction that people are subjected to in addition to the punishment of the penal system as we know it.

The other main concern we have about restorative justice is whether it continues the dynamic that is embedded in the prison system which is to look at crime as a problem that happens between individuals rather than a systemic problem that grows out of a context. We think a real restorative model will have to look systemically at what's happening.

Next, we look at crime as a problem that happens between individuals rather than a systemic problem that grows out of a context. We think a real restorative model will have to look systemically at what's happening.

Critical Resistance: In the book you [talk] about how you can't separate individual justice from social and economic justice. Where do you see openings for actually changing economic and social structures?

Laura Magnani: That's tough because we've been moving rapidly in the wrong direction. The gap between the rich and the poor is much wider than it was 30 years ago. Corporations have seriously taken over so that we don't have a democracy of citizens influencing elected officials we have a system of moneyed interests influencing elected officials. To shift to an earth based economy, a human life based economy over a profit-based empire is a tall order. It's not a small thing.

We have to figure out how we can create economic solutions that are more inclusive; that don't allow this tiny percentage of people to own all of the resources and capital. It's going to mean people on the bottom saying: enough, we have a right to share these resources and to survive together.

Critical Resistance: What role would reparations have in shifting resources [and] decision-making processes to people who are at the bottom of this economic pyramid?

Laura Magnani: There are ways of organizing society that are not so out of balance. And we've gotten really out of balance. Reparations is a process for addressing serious wrongs that have occurred. One of the most glaring examples is the Japanese internment situation where we rounded up people and incarcerated them for three years in deserts around the country because we decided to be afraid of them. We took their rights away and we took their property away. Then some 40 years later people woke up to the fact that this was a terrible act.

There were a number of steps taken to try to redress those wrongs beginning with a recognition, at the highest levels of government, that it was wrong. The next step was an official apology for having done it. And the next step was looking at ways of redressing that wrong which led to monetary reparations for the people who had suffered internment.

Reparations have the virtue of retelling history so there is a record of what happened, and people don't have to be in denial of historical events. History is told by the victors normally, and it leaves out the people on the inside. One of the advantages of the truth and reconciliation process is that it establishes a record of truth based on people coming forth and telling their stories, which is a healing thing in and of itself. People can no longer be in denial. That's the first step towards real justice and healing possibilities.

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However, in a society that is continually evolving, one must hope that as time progresses, it will incorporate improved conditions for the prison-no death or serious physical injury.

Considers that these SHU trophy prisoners are incarcerated for felony offenses as minor as common theft, drug possession, and crimes that resulted in they deem a threat, or whom they classify as unofficial trophies. These prisoners are held in catastrophically inhuman security housing units (SHU) in opportunity to defend against any charges. In glaring opposition to the worldwide standard of right of notice, the CDCR isolates selected prisoners who For example, the U.N. protections require notice of any charges or allegations against a prisoner, and also require that a prisoner be given the incorporated in the official policy, practice, and common procedures within the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR).

Not long ago the guillotine worked overtime, prisoners were tied and lashed with a cat-o-nine-tails, prisoners were drawn and quartered and even boiled in oil. Today the world would be outraged at the prospect of a prisoner being tied to four horses that pulled his body into four separate pieces. America remains one of the dwindling groups of countries that allow the death penalty, and even here, most of the 50 states prohibits the state sanctioned murder of human beings. As one reads the Body of Principles for the protection of prisoners, it's clear that many of the prohibited acts are incorporated in the official policy, practice, and common procedures within the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR).

For example, the U.N. protections require notice of any charges or allegations against a prisoner, and also require that a prisoner be given the opportunity to defend against any charges. In glaring opposition to the worldwide standard of right of notice, the CDCR isolates selected prisoners who deem a threat, or whom they classify as unofficial trophies. These prisoners are held in catastrophically inhuman security housing units (SHU) in perpetual isolation without the prospect of parole. In such conditions for three decades and more. A flash point of outrageous go a long way to empty out the system. Instead of solitary confinement and people are doing years at time in sensory deprivation with practically no human contact. You don't grow better people doing that and there isn't any excuse for that. But once we allow ourselves to say that some people are so bad that they need to be in these kinds of conditions, or that some people are so bad they need to be killed, we open a door that gets wider and wider.

Rather than housing the “worst of the worst” in solitary confinement we have tens of thousands of people doing sentences that way. Most of them have some kind of presumed gang association; you know association and not affiliation, somebody who knows somebody. You can't really be in the prison system without knowing people who are not in the gang involved so it's very discretionary. People who are politically active, teachers, organizers, and people who speak out for their rights are the people being put into conditions where they won't have any contact. In California we've seen the horrors of these conditions for juveniles. People are killing themselves when put into this kind of isolation. It needs to be abolished.

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The history of the prison system is the history of racism in this country and people need to take that extremely seriously. Purpose of solitary confinement and people are doing years at time in sensory deprivation with practically no human contact. You don't grow better people doing that and there isn't any excuse for that. But once we allow ourselves to say that some people are so bad that they need to be in these kinds of conditions, or that some people are so bad they need to be killed, we open a door that gets wider and wider.

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We talk about decriminalization of a wide variety of conditions. We can decriminalize homelessness, mental illness, drug addiction, alcohol addiction. If we had a health care system in this country we could reduce the prison population overnight. We could treat mental illness as an illness and treat it through the health system. We could be treat drug addiction and provide access to treatment to people who can't get it now because of poverty. Decriminalization of a number of social problems would in a long way to empty out the system.

We also address amending the 13th amendment to the constitution. The 13th amendment, which abolished slavery retained slavery for prisoners. It allows involuntary servitude of people who have broken laws and are under the court system. That should be amended so there is no slavery for anybody because as long as there is slavery allowed for categories of people the economic system will find ways to make use of the captive workforce. We call for the widespread implementation of international law because it prohibits a lot of the practices that happen in our prisons. Covenants and treaties that we have signed are not being followed in this country. The Service Committee has used international law to bring forth what we have seen in our experience working inside; documenting human rights abuses and bringing that to UN Forums for consideration is really important.

We talk about the juvenile system and the needs of children not to be tired as adults and treated as though they have the same cognitive skills as a fully mature person. Children need special treatment and provisions and there is no place for zero tolerance when talking about children. And finally, the 12th point is a campaign for reparations that could take place on many levels. Reparations don't have to mean an payment to an individual. It could mean looking at the social system itself. One way to make reparations to a certain class or ethnic group is to put resources into the school system or provide services to particular populations. There are ways of doing it that are not individually based but would redress injustices that have happened over time.
The records of the FBI and other agencies of surveillance lose their “classified” status, officially speaking, after 25 years. After a federal law passed during the Clinton years, these files are now slated for automatic release. The deadline for unsealing all time-eligible material was set for 2000, then delayed once to 2003 and yet again to New Year’s Eve, 2006. Distinct from the CIA and the National Security Agency, for example, the FBI is reported to have rushed to declassify 270 million pages of its records, while arranging for 50 million other pages to be exempted from this much-ballyhooed declassification. Despite the excessive number of exemptions (approximately one quarter of all acknowledged files), many scholars and researchers have applauded their government while awaiting select materials, dating as far back as World War II. There is no sign of COINTELPRO and its continuation in the rosy commentary of such scholars; that is, no sign of the J. Edgar Hoover-orchestrated COunter INTELligence PROgram, a murderous program designed to “expose, disrupt, misdirect or otherwise neutralize” the modern Black liberation movement and various other activities of dissent under U.S political domination. Recently, and it’s not clear when exactly, “George Jackson: File 44-HQ-50522” was released by the FBI. As of now, it is even electronically available (at http://foia.fbi.gov) and officially divided into five parts. This division appears to be arbitrary, however; the file is absurdly thin. These 100-plus pages are padded with an array of non-FBI materials, to boot. This is how Jackson is introduced by the FBI in the file: “George Lester Jackson was born on September 23, 1941, and was a prisoner inmate who along with two other prisoners at Soledad State Prison, Soledad, Monterey County, California was indicted for murder and assault in the death of Correctional Officer Mills, “ the FBI continues, “At the time of the assault, which resulted in the death of Officer Mills, “ the FBI concludes its introduction by continuing to criminalize Black resistance to bondage: “George Jackson was killed during an abortive prison break at San Quentin on August 21, 1971. George Jackson wrote a [sic] book in prison, “Blood in My Eye” [sic] which was received at the publisher just two weeks before he died.” The text and context of Soledad Brother is disappeared in this account like loads of other information, including the fact that Drumgo and Clutchette would one day be found innocent of the murder of Mills and that Drumgo and five others would be later cleared of all charges levied against them after the events of August 21, 1971, and-ed with promises of parole or preferential treatment; witnesses who refuse are not harassed; no poisonings, no set-ups and no Nazi-style race tactics are used to coerce anyone, anywhere. Second, there is the document of the actual suit submitted to the courts by the Soledad Brothers lawyer, Faye Stender. This is not an FBI document. Third, there is a review of Jackson’s Blood in My Eye. This memo-review is of immediate interest insofar as it presupposes the existence of the FBI and his brother Jonathan Jackson that will never materialize under the guise of declassification. Fourth, and finally, there is evidence of posthumous surveillance, which is to say, damage control and neutralization efforts in the aftermath of the physical liquidation of the person under surveillance. The closing pages of this file are related to the publication of Blood in My Eye. They include some newspaper and magazine clippings and a draft of a letter to The Washington Post from then FBI Acting Director (and collaborator in Nixon Watergate crimes) L. Patrick Gray III, both of which reflect the bedrock connection between the work of state repression and the work of the establishment press. The file glosses over Jackson’s autobiography report. The cause or true circumstance of death does not seem to matter. The focus is instead placed on the subject’s reputed desire to escape prison as if this were the ultimate, most shocking “crime” of all “crimes.” This criminalization of escape or the desire for freedom is part of the detention and diagnostic politics of “drapeotmania,” the so-called “pathological” desire of enslaved captives to escape their enslavement, a psychiatric diagnosis concocted by Samuel A. Cartwright of the Louisiana Medical Association in 1851. Truly, wanting to be free is a “crime” and “disease” under the current historical order of things. Why is “George Jackson: File 44-HQ-50522” significant? In few, relatively rare, cases the release of certain records of the FBI has been useful to a living prisoner in his or her quest to secure their release from the state. This would be despite blacked-out documents, deleted pages, massive file exemptions, etc. Much more often than not, however, pseudo-declassification has not been useful to political prisoners at all. No one has been prosecuted for COINTELPRO crimes, ever. Pseudo-declassification has arguably been more useful to the state and the FBI in their quest to legitimate themselves and the myths of declassification and democracy. To endorse these mythologies requires a terrifying amnesia. Therefore the official records of the U.S. government should be read in order to CONTINUED ON PAGE 8
Valley Fever is an illness caused by Coccioidiodendrug, a fungus that lives in the soil in the southwestern United States, Mexico, and in some parts of Central and South America. It primarily infects the lungs, but can spread to other parts of the body. People become infected when they inhale the spores of the infectious fungus. Spores become airborne when soil containing the fungus is disturbed by construction, natural disasters, or wind. It cannot be spread from one person to another. About 60% of people infected do not have symptoms. Commonly reported symptoms include fatigue, cough, chest pain, fever, rash, headaches, and joint aches. In otherwise healthy individuals, complete recovery takes about six months. A small percentage of infected persons (≤1%) can develop disease that spreads outside the lungs to the brain, bone, and skin. Without proper treatment, Valley Fever can lead to severe pneumonia, meningitis, and even death, therefore it is very important to receive treatment! Individuals can be diagnosed by a blood test and severe cases are treated with antifungal medication. Most individuals recover with no treatment. Western medical doctors will prescribe ketoconazole, itraconazole and fluconazole for chronic, mild-to-moderate cases. For more severe cases, they will give you amphotericin B intravenously or inserted into the spinal fluid. Surgical removal of lung cavities and drainage of abscesses in bones or joints caused by Valley Fever are also commonly used in severe cases. There are also alternative, non-pharmaceutical treatments. These treatments focus on creating an internal environment where the fungus cannot survive. Individuals can do this by eating a diet low in dairy products, sugars, including honey and fruit juice, and foods like beer that contain yeast. People most at risk for getting Valley Fever are people who disturb soil on a regular basis (ex. construction workers, farmers) and people with compromised immune systems. It is estimated that 150,000 persons develop Valley Fever each year in the southwest United States. The only way to prevent acquiring Valley Fever is to avoid exposure to dust and dry soil in areas where Valley Fever is common. There is currently no vaccine available to prevent Valley Fever, but there are measures people can take to prevent infection. If individuals cannot limit their time outdoors in infected areas, wet the soil before disturbing the earth, or wear dust masks that can filter particles small as 0.4 μm. Prisons are not likely to provide these to prisoners willingly, but aside from not living or working in a place that has this fungus in the soil, these masks are the best protection.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 10
**Recently The Abolitionist** was lucky enough to talk with Ruth Wilson Gilmore about her new book, *Golden Gulag: Prisons, Surplus, Crisis, and Opposition in Globalizing California*. Ruthie is one of the founding members of Critical Resistance and of California Prison Moratorium Project. She is also an Associate Professor or Geography and the Chair of American Studies and Ethnicity at the University of Southern California. *Golden Gulag* is an important resource for anyone who wants to learn more about the rise of imprisonment in California and effective responses to California’s prison crisis. What follows are excerpts from that conversation.

**Critical Resistance**: How did Golden Gulag develop?

**Ruth Wilson Gilmore**: The project developed many years ago when I started doing political work with a small group of women, most of whom were African American and mothers of adults and juveniles in the California prison and youth authority system. A friend of the group’s founders told me that they needed some help, so I showed up to see what I could do. The main help they asked for at the outset concerned understanding several new laws. I’m not a lawyer, but I know how to use libraries and so forth, so I got busy. The plan was that I would conduct a Saturday workshop and we would all get a better sense of how the laws worked. Our goal was that everyone would perhaps begin to help their loved one facing trial under these laws have a better outcome in her or his case. However, what we discovered was the laws – the 1988 STEP ACT, and the 1994 THREE STRIKES ACT, were overwhelming in how they altered the meaning and practice of justice. As we studied the laws we also got to talking about why people who were being locked up were being sent further and further from home. So the second project I started was to look into why new prisons were being built in very far-away places being sent further and further from home. The negative effects in urban areas of criminalization and de-industrialization were mirrored in rural areas where communities of color had been put more and more out of work, because of changes in agriculture, the timber industry, and other rural industries. So, in order to think that through adequately, I decided that I had to write the second chapter of my book on the California political economy. What is political economy? It is the study of the role of large-scale organizations such as governments, unions, and corporations, play in the movement of money and the movement of working people. Why are some places rich and some places poor?

Now, a lot of people ask: Why do we have to slog through all this stuff? Why can’t we just throw our fists in the air and say, “the system is evil, down with the system?” The problem we face in the early 21st Century is that when we throw up our fists in the air and denounce the system in which the least popular people in the United States have been locked up, we are much more covered with our clasped eyes, and the purpose of the slog through all those details of political economy is to enable all of us who do work on the outside and on the inside to see where the weaknesses in the system might be so that we can decide really strategically where to throw our fists and where to raise our voices.

**CR**: How did you get from asking the question of why people’s family members were being sent further and further away to the question of prison expansion?

**RWG**: When I was trying to imagine the scope of this project, I asked myself: what do I need to learn in order to answer the types of questions that the group and our allies were asking ourselves? What do I need to know in order to answer the question: “Why are prisons built so far away?” What do I need to know to answer the question, “Why are so many people getting caught up in the criminalizing dragnet?”

And the way I went about answering the questions was to first imagine a possible answer to see if it worked. It would not necessarily be the right answer, but it was a potential answer. One of the answers, for example, to the question “Why are they building prisons so far away?” is: They must be good for the communities where they’re built. That seemed like a reasonable enough answer, and it’s certainly the answer that most of us in Los Angeles thought would be true. It turned out to be completely wrong – prisons are not good for the communities where they’re built! And that was totally shocking. What was happening to all those jobs and all that money?

As I studied the kinds of places where prisons were built, I discovered that those communities and the communities where prisoners came from were more like each other than any other they had dreamed. The negative effects in urban areas of criminalization and de-industrialization were mirrored in rural areas where communities of color had been put more and more out of work, because of changes in agriculture, the timber industry, and other rural industries. So, in order to think that through adequately, I decided that I had to write the second chapter of my book on the California political economy. What is political economy? It is the study of the role large-scale organizations such as governments, unions, and corporations, play in the movement of money and the movement of working people. Why are some places rich and some places poor?

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**RWG**: Agriculture and other kinds of resource extraction like lumbering or mining or any work in which you take something out of the ground or you develop something from the ground have changed a lot over time. Agriculture, growing things to make clothing or produce food, is done more and more by machinery and chemicals, though there are still hundreds of thousands of farm workers. In 1900 41% ofolum’s economy, the rest of the country, has an enormous number of places where the communities where prisons are built are very like, in terms of demographics, the places where prisoners come from. They’re poor. They’re often communities of color. They’re places where the kinds of jobs that people can get to take care of themselves and their families have gotten worse if not disappeared altogether, and they are exactly the kinds of places from which people move to urban places hoping to find jobs. So my point here is to highlight that the distinction that the people who are from the communities where prisons are built are completely different and hostile to the people who are sent to prison just isn’t true.

**CR**: To continue talking about the relationship between prison towns and the cities from which prisoners come, there are some interesting points you raise about the relationship between agricultural production and the growth of the prison economy California’s Central Valley.

**RWG**: Around the country there is some difference, but let me talk a little bit about what we used to call the Sun Belt. The Sun Belt starts somewhere just a little south of the District of Columbia on the East Coast, goes all the way south, comes across the Southeast, across Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, and runs up the west coast of the United States all the way up to the Canada border. The Sun Belt, which is a huge part of the country, has an enormous number of places where the communities where prisons are built are very like, in terms of demographics, the places where prisoners come from. They’re poor. They’re often communities of color. They’re places where the kinds of jobs that people can get to take care of themselves and their families have gotten worse if not disappeared altogether, and they are exactly the kinds of places from which people move to urban places hoping to find jobs. So my point here is to highlight that the distinction that the people who are from the communities where prisons are built are completely different and hostile to the people who are sent to prison just isn’t true.

**CR**: What do you think is California exceptional in that way?

**RWG**: The Sun Belt starts somewhere just a little south of the District of Columbia on the East Coast, goes all the way south, comes across the Southeast, across Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, and runs up the west coast of the United States all the way up to the Canada border. The Sun Belt, which is a huge part of the country, has an enormous number of places where the communities where prisons are built are very like, in terms of demographics, the places where prisoners come from. They’re poor. They’re often communities of color. They’re places where the kinds of jobs that people can get to take care of themselves and their families have gotten worse if not disappeared altogether, and they are exactly the kinds of places from which people move to urban places hoping to find jobs. So my point here is to highlight that the distinction that the people who are from the communities where prisons are built are completely different and hostile to the people who are sent to prison just isn’t true.

**RWG**: Agriculture and other kinds of resource extraction like lumbering or mining or any work in which you take something out of the ground or you develop something from the ground have changed a lot over time. Agriculture, growing things to make clothing or produce food, is done more and more by machinery and chemicals, though there are still hundreds of thousands of farm workers. In 1900 41% of all working people in the United States worked on farms. Today less than 2% work on farms. Today a machine harvests tomatoes whereas not long ago tomatoes could only be harvested by hand. That means fewer people work harvesting tomatoes. Or let’s take chemicals. Not very long ago, many crops had to be tended by people who would go into the fields, see weeds and chop them out or pull them out. Now chemicals are sprayed on crops to kill the weeds and spare the crops or the seeds that are used to grow the crops in the first place have been changed, genetically modified, in order to be resistant to certain kinds of weeds and pests. All of this means that people who used to work in the fields don’t work in the fields anymore.
Believe me, I’m not saying let’s bring back the good old days of humans harvesting cotton by hand. But I am saying this change in how crops are produced has displaced a lot of people from jobs. I remember reading a story about some broccoli growers in the United States who were growing broccoli in Mississippi. When they saw a mechanized harvester for the first time in 1943 they saw they had no future in the South; they packed up and rolled north to Chicago. As fewer and fewer people have worked in certain industries, something else has gone on as well. The people who work in various kinds of agriculture have fought over forty or fifty years to organize for decent wages. Like the brothers in Mississippi, agricultural workers in California and elsewhere have seen coming the fact that fewer people in any given household will work in the fields or in agricultural-related work such as canneries or packing houses. A household still needs a certain amount of money to survive. So, what the workers in the fields, canneries, and packing houses have done is organize into unions.

The last thing any agricultural owner wants is for the workers to be organized and to demand higher wages, so one of the things that has happened is that people who own the land, the really rich farmers and their allies in government, have worked together to bring in non-agricultural jobs to divert agricultural workers from trying to organize themselves. In my book we see that in case of Corcoran, California, in the mid-1980s the big land owners and the city and county governments decided to try to get a prison right at the time when the Central Farm Workers and Cesar Chavez were trying to organize the cotton workers there.

The prison turned out to be an enormous and permanent diversionary tactic. The people in Corcoran were led to believe that they would get jobs in the prison and that those jobs would be so well paying that the fact that they failed to unionize the agricultural jobs wouldn’t make any difference. At the end of the day, they neither had the union in the fields nor the jobs in the prison.

CR: To take that even one step further, you also talk about the relationship between the military economy and the prison economy. Can you say more about that relationship?

RWG: California had a lot of wealth that was stolen, which is to say seized or appropriated by people who came to this state in the wake of the U.S. conquest of this part of Mexico. They took it from gold fields, from silver fields, from timber, from agriculture. They took it by diverting enormous amounts of water and converting land into pieces of residential property.

In addition to all of the fundamental wealth that California had in it that was stolen from indigenous people and people who were citizens of Mexico (who stole their wealth from indigenous people), California got even richer starting in the late 1930s and early 1940s, when the United States Federal Government dumped an enormous amount of money into this state to build up the military capacity of the United States. The U.S. didn’t only build bases [and] build up the soldiers, though that was part of it. The U.S. also built up its military capacity in terms of making warfare machinery like planes and bombs and various kinds of warfare vehicles. And the U.S. built it up in terms of funding intellectuals who designed warfare machinery, and the internet, and who craft the policies that result in such activities as going to war in Iraq. All of this was funded by the federal government, and a whole lot of the money poured into California steadily over the past 65-plus years.

That military wealth helped make it possible for California to develop rapidly from a predominantly agricultural economy into an industrial and manufacturing economy. Some of the manufacturing was for warfare and other of the manufacturing was for the kinds of things that the people who flocked to California to work in those industries needed. So, California also became a big producer of automobiles, for example, and a big producer of many other products needed to keep the consumer-driven economy of this country going. In the midst of all that movement of people and money -- this is political economy, remember -- lots of people were attracted to California or lots of people in California moved into the large scale manufacturing economy that characterized the best jobs in this state from about 1940 until the early to mid-1970s. Those included African American women and men, Mexican American, Chicano/Latino women and men, as well as white working people who may have started out in agriculture but eventually wound up in urban areas and working in industry. Southern California also became home to the largest urban Native American community in North America.

Those people organized to make sure that the wages they were paid were good enough so that they could afford to maybe send their kids to college, and live pretty OK lives. But when those industries started to leave this region because the owners did not want to continue paying high wages to the workers and paying high taxes to the state. Why were the industries paying high taxes to California? For their own good! 

They paid the taxes to make sure the state was educating and looking after the health of workers, and building the roads and other infrastructure they needed to do their business in the state. At the time owners withdrew good pay and high taxes, we see the beginning of a huge downward spiral in terms of the environment, educational access, and a deepening inequality throughout the state. This downward spiral, which was swift and devastating, kicked in the engine that drove the expansion of prisons in this state.

At the beginning of the 1970s, California’s prosperity was still relatively widely spread, and kids, for example, had a lot of hope. State law guaranteed them a free education from Head Start to Ph.D. and the number of kids in poverty had declined quite significantly from World War II until the beginning of the '70s. But today, even though the state is the 5th or 6th largest economy in the world one in four kids lives in poverty. That decline goes hand in hand with the decline in blue collar or working class jobs, and the rise in prisons.
California News Briefs: Legislative Updates and Information
Compiled by Rose Braz and David Stein

On April 26, 2007, California Governor, Arnold Schwarzenegger, announced an agreement to build 53,000 new prison, jail and juvenile detention beds at a cost of $15 billion.

- The agreement does not include any of the numerous changes to parole or sentencing policies that have been put forward as alternatives to prison expansion plans.
- In addition, the Governor has stated his intention to include the 4,500 bed construction project for what are being called Female Rehabsitive Community Corrections Centers (FRCCCs) in his May revised budget. These additional beds for women are being added after strong, broad-based opposition from California organizations providing services for women in prison, labor, feminist scholars, experts and others, to a bill (AB76) that would have authorized construction of these new beds earlier this year. As a result of this opposition the bill had been stripped of all construction in the Assembly Public Safety Committee.

The Governor Puts Construction Ahead Of Reform
- The Governor’s proposed Sentencing Commission would not have the power to change sentencing, but could only make suggestions.
- The Governor’s Commission would be: the Attorney General, the head of Corrections, a judge, legislators, and representatives from law enforcement and crime victims groups.

Are There Any Proposals To Reduce The Number Of People In Prison?
Yes, The Governor’s Budget Proposes Two Small, But Important, Changes To Parole.
- The Governor is proposing that California follow the lead of other states who do not place every person on parole upon completion of a sentence.
- The Governor is proposing that California enforce a current law that provides that certain individuals who have served 12 months of parole without a violation be discharged.

These minor changes are projected to reduce the number of people on parole by 24,000 and save $56.7 million in 2007-08 and $75.5 million in 2008-09.

Another piece of proposed legislation of note is AB-79:
- AB-79 has been introduced by Kathleen Galgiani. Existing law states that the Board of Parole will hear each case, every year after any meeting at which parole is denied. Though current law also states that for prisoners whom have been convicted of murder, the board can delay the hearing up to five years if it is “not reasonable to expect that parole would be granted at a hearing during the following years” so long as the board states their basis for the findings in writing. The bill proposes that prisoners who have been convicted of murder will have parole hearings five years after any hearing at which parole has been denied.

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 4

oppose this rhetoric and this amnesia of the status quo. Otherwise, even someone like George Jackson is effectively “forgotten” or demonized.

The FBI tale is of course not the story told by Stephen Bingham, the lawyer who was accused and, in 1984, acquitted of aiding and abetting the alleged “escape attempt” at San Quentin State Prison on the day of Jackson’s murder. After the recent execution of Stanley “Tookie” Williams, Bingham recalled that they learned from trial discovery that Jackson was a key target of COINTELPRO, but they were never given any records. Of course, those materials are nowhere to be seen in this “declassified” FBI file, nor is anything surrounding the activities of Louis E. Tackwood, the double agent-provocateur who would “confess” to state-sponsored crimes in newspaper articles, a book and his “San Quentin 6” testimony in 1976. Tackwood said his first assignment was to help plot the murder of Jackson.

An ex-political prisoner and Black Panther Party leader in New York, Dhuruba Bin Wahad adds in Still Black, Still Strong: Survivors of the War against Black Revolutionaries (Semiotext(e), 1993) that the COINTELPRO murder of Jackson led to “Operation PRISAC,” a program targeting prison activists after the criminal successes of COINTELPRO. To ask where these documents are in the recent pseudo-declassification of records is to ask a question to which the FBI will provide no real answer, surely. In closing, all this secrecy, violence and cover-up of surveillance simply confirms George Jackson’s work, more than three and half decades after its initial appearance from behind the wall. In “American Justice,” Jackson testifies: “The ultimate expression of law is not order—it’s prison. There are hundreds upon hundreds of prisons, and thousands upon thousands of laws, yet there is no social order, no social peace. Anglo-Saxon bourgeois law is tied firmly to economics…. The law and everything that interlocks with it was constructed for poor, desperate people like me” (Blood in My Eye, 100).

The FBI both enforces and breaks colonial/neo-colonial bourgeois law to protect the race and class interests of the ruling race and class. It cannot declassify any documentation of this process without demystifying that process and the whole project of domination. For this very reason, what the release of this file reveals more than anything else is the truth of George Jackson’s radical criticism of “fascism” and “neo-slavery” found in Soledad Brother, Blood in My Eye and beyond, a critical practice needed now more than ever.
In recent years, especially since September 11, 2001, more attention has been paid to escalating immigration enforcement and detention, which destroy people, families and communities. Indeed, 9/11 has been used by the U.S. government as an excuse to fuel this escalation through the implementation of a dizzying variety of laws, policies and budget allocations. However, as many who have been active in the immigrant rights movement know, such enforcement and detention were already on the rise well before 2001.

Many have pointed to 1996 as the significant turning point in the increase of immigration policing and detention. That year, both the Anti Terrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act (AEDPA) and the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act (IIRIRA) were passed by Congress, and, together, these bills made more immigrants subject to deportation and detention traps, and allocated more resources to immigrant policing. However, the policing/imprisonment escalation immigrants are now experiencing has its roots much further back than even 1996; it is intimately interconnected to the growth of the prison industrial complex (PIC), generally.

Nonetheless, a lot of people who talk about the increased policing and imprisonment of immigrants fail to analyze this increase as part of the massive growth in the PIC. Instead, folks sometimes compare and contrast the two phenomena as though they’re separate. And, often, this false distinction is implied in the way immigrants who are imprisoned are characterized as “innocent victims”, unlike “real” criminals. This is true even among many of the folks working hard to challenge the increased reliance on imprisonment and deportation in U.S. immigration policy. The failure to analyze immigration policies and the PIC together, and to challenge them simultaneously, does a disservice to our movements to abolish cages as solutions to social problems and promote true and just liberation for all. One indicator of the consequences of this failure? Immigrants are now the fastest-growing segment of the prison population in the U.S.

Though far from an exhaustive or comprehensive list, here are just a few examples of how immigration enforcement and detention are an embedded part of the PIC:

- Increasingly, immigration enforcement is being integrated into the duties of local police, jail administrators, and probation and parole officers.
- For non-US citizens who are criminally prosecuted, immigration detention and deportation are often seamless next steps after prosecution, sentencing, and serving time on the conviction. The agency with control over the person may formally shift (from the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation, for example, to the Department of Homeland Security (DHS)), but the literal conditions of confinement often remain the same: the person is still imprisoned in a jail or prison.
- Prison-building and profit accumulation by private prison companies continues at a brisk pace despite the fact that these same companies were starting to mothball facilities in the late 90’s as state prison contracts were drying up. Now, instead of the state contracts that had been their mainstay, private prisons are depending more and more on the Department of Homeland Security’s seemingly never ending demand for more space to imprison immigrants.
- The majority of immigration detainees, however, are imprisoned neither in private institutions nor DHS-run facilities, they are in local jails throughout the U.S.
- Imprisonment as a tool of immigration enforcement has increased so dramatically that even pro-immigrant advocates are pushing for widespread use of “humane alternatives” to imprisonment, such as electronic tethers. Such “alternatives,” however, serve to entrench the state’s surveillance and policing powers more broadly.
- For several decades, military contractors have expanded the “domestic security industry” by promoting an array of technologies to be used by prisons and law enforcement agencies for social control and surveillance throughout the U.S. Particularly lucrative, several-billion dollar contracts are being awarded to deploy a vast arsenal of these technologies to police the U.S. – Mexico border.
- Increasing border enforcement since the early 1990’s has resulted in a dramatic expansion of both local and criminal prosecutions in jurisdictions all along the border. Over time, these increasing prosecutions are also resulting in longer sentences than previously imposed.
- Many immigration sweeps include apprehension and prosecution of U.S. citizens, most of whom have past criminal convictions. For example, during Operation Tarmac, the employment records of hundreds of thousands of airport workers were scrutinized by immigration authorities, then raids were conducted at airports around the country, arresting more than a thousand people who were accused of making “false statements” on their employment applications. While most of the arrestees were immigrants who allegedly used false social security numbers, several of the apprehended were U.S. citizens whose “false statement” was failure to disclose a past criminal conviction. As a result of the immigration enforcement operations, these citizens were re-subjected to criminal prosecution and imprisonment.

In future issues of The Abolitionist, we intend to share more specific information and analyses to update you about recent trends in the escalation of immigration enforcement and detention. In addition, and most importantly, we also hope to include stories and interviews with folks who are creatively organizing efforts to challenge and dismantle the immigration policies that expand and entrench the PIC. We welcome your feedback as to the kinds of immigration-related stories you would like to see covered in future issues.
Majid

Majid Khan was granted legal asylum in the United States in 1998. He graduated from Owings Mills High School in Baltimore Maryland. He worked for the state of Maryland and married a woman from Pakistan. In March of 2003, Majid was asleap in his brother’s home in Pakistan when soldiers claiming to work for the Pakistani Secret Service barged in, hooded and cuffed Majid, his brother, his sister in law, and her infant daughter and took them away. While the others were soon released, no one heard from Majid for more than three years. Then, in September 2006, President Bush announced that after years in secret detention, Majid was headed for Guantanamo Bay.

One month after announcing that Majid was being held at Guantanamo, President Bush signed into law the Military Commissions Act (MCA). The passage of the MCA means that Majid and his family in Baltimore may never know the truth of why Majid was kidnapped and, if the law is allowed to stand, Majid will never have a chance to challenge his detention in a court of law. No one knows how far reaching the MCA will be, but we do know that the point of the MCA is to rewrite the law. The MCA allows the Bush administration to detain people for as long as they want, for whatever reasons they want, and to do Majid and others almost anything they want with no oversight and no reasonable chance for Majid to make the case for his innocence. The MCA is the most far-reaching piece of legislation passed by congress since the PATRIOT ACT, and too few people know what it means.

Understanding The Military Commissions Act

By Tommy Stevenson

Who Does It Effect?

Short Answer – Probably anyone they want it to.

The MCA is supposed to cover the interrogation and processing of “enemy combatants.” We hear this term so much in the news, that it is easy to think that it has some meaning in the realm of international law. It doesn’t. “Enemy combatant” was invented by the Bush Administration to give a name to the people they were holding, people like Jose Padilla, and Majid Khan, in naval brigs, Afghan prisons and Guantanamo Bay. Before the MCA, the term didn’t even have a definition. It was what President Bush said it was, and that changed from day to day. Currently the wording in the MCA tells us that an enemy combatant is anyone who has “(1) engaged in hostilities or who has purposefully and materially supported hostilities against the United States or its co-belligerents or (2) has been deemed an enemy combatant by a combatant status review tribunal or another competent tribunal under the authority of the President or Defense Secretary.” There’s a lot to unpack in that definition, so let’s take it one step at a time.

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 5

Human Rights. They publicized their experiences and contextualized them within the broader U.S. violations of human rights on domestic (prisons, policing, PATRIOT ACT, etc.) and international levels (Guantanamo and Abu Ghraib, militarism, war, etc.). In doing so, they were also able to re-establish connections with former comrades and establish ties with new allies and movements. Then came the January 23, 2007, arrests with attempts by the state to rewrite history and attempt to demonstrate to current and future generations that it will spare no expense and disinterest to quell resistance. However, as they tried to quell the resistance, the once clandestine methods brought with it Dick Cheney, Donald Rumsfeld, and John Ashcroft, bureaucrats who cut their teeth in COINTELPRO operations during the Nixon years. It is an observation that does not substitute conspiracy theory for a systematic and ideological analysis of the lineage of repression in the U.S.; it is an observation that does not replace the history of oppression is at the same time the history of the struggle for freedom: to the rising floodwaters of state- and capital orchestrated devastation, there is a hydroelectric tide of resistance. With the case of the SF8, the state is attempting to prove that the people have come together to stand against the onslaught. The campaign to free the SF8 has been organized on a national level. Previously disconnected movements have found opportunity to work in solidarity with one another and the ground for understanding and engaging with history could not be more fertile. It is this potential for a broad, strong, and revitalized base of support that can be effective in setting these men free and enabling all of us to move forward in our struggle.

Who Does It Effect?

Short Answer – Probably anyone they want it to.
citizen, you get the worst that the MCA has to offer. To be labeled an enemy combatant. But, if you are not a U.S. citizen, you can take away a US citizen's right to their day in court. As of this writing, Majid has been incarcerated for over four years and still hasn't had a trial.

What does this mean for non-citizens? Short Answer - It isn't good news. The US has told people that you cannot take away a US citizen's right to their day in court whether you label them an enemy combatant or not. But non-citizens are another story all together. Take Majid, for example. Majid was, at the time of his capture, a legal resident of the United States. He had gone to public school, worked and paid taxes in Maryland and, under the MCA, he had no recourse to challenge his detention in court because under the Military Commissions Act, Majid and other non-citizens lose their ability to use the most basic concept of the western legal tradition - the writ of habeas corpus. They have no means to "produce the body." It is a way of forcing the government to give you a day in court where they tell you why they are holding you and what evidence they have to substantiate their claims against you. Since the time of the English revolution it has been a powerful check on governmental abuse. Now, for the first time in US history, it has been indefinitely taken away from non-citizens trying to challenge their detention by the US government. Without the ability to challenge their detention (or anything else) in a court of law, non-citizens caught up in the war on terror are without rights. They can be treated as the Bush administration pleases and there is nothing they or their attorneys can do to stop it.

Can they use this against US citizens and prisoners? Short answer - no one knows. How the MCA could be used against US prisoners, residents or citizens is still an open question. None of which related to any "dirty bombs."

The first part of the definition deals from the language of the MCA itself that in order to be labeled "the dirty bomber" by the Bush administration is accused of everything from attempting to gain nuclear weapons to trying to blow up a Manhattan apartment building. None of those charges were ever substantiated and, after it became more and more likely that the administration was going to suffer a serious rebuke by the Supreme Court for its handling of Padilla, the Bush Administration decided to end the experiment of handling a US citizen as an enemy combatant and moved Padilla's case to federal court where he awaits trial on a number of charges. None of which related to any "dirty bombs."

Because the enemy combatant status failed to keep Padilla from his day in court, does not mean it will not be used against US citizens in the future. The Bush administration decided to avoid a confrontation regarding citizens labeled as enemy combatants by dropping Padilla's enemy combatant status, but there is no guarantee they won't behave differently in the future. It is all but impossible to strip the citizenship of a natural born American citizen, which means US citizens are spared the worst. The MCA has to offer. This is probably of little consolation to Padilla, who has been incarcerated for over four years and still hasn't had a trial.

What can they do to you? Short answer - a lot. When the MCA was being debated, most of the coverage focused on the so-called "McCain amendment" which would make it more difficult to torture those labeled enemy combatants. McCain won that round, but the amendment named after him is little comfort to those stuck at US facilities around the world. According to the MCA, coercive interrogation is allowed as long as it is in line with the Army Field Manual. What exactly it means to be in line with the field manual is open to debate, since portions of it are classified. We do know from the language of the MCA itself that in order to be defined as torture, the actions of U.S. personnel must inflict "severe or physical mental pain or suffering." What exactly does this mean? According to the MCA, the actions must be "severe" in order to be considered torture. The definition of torture under the MCA is so limited as to be ineffective. Numerous physically coercive practices that would be deemed injurious, if not life threatening, can still be used under the MCA.

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The MCA does not allow for the use of evidence obtained during torture, but two things combine to make this a useless provision. First, the definition of torture under the MCA is so limited as to be ineffective. Numerous physically coercive practices that would be deemed injurious, if not life threatening, can still be used under the MCA.

Secondly, because the MCA allows for no legal recourse for non-citizens deemed enemy combatants, there is no recourse for those who are terrorized by their interrogators. Prohibiting torture, but not allowing possible victims to challenge the conditions of their interrogation is the classic example of a right without a remedy. We'll say we won't torture you, but if we do, you will have no way to stop us. This line of reasoning, and the Bush Administration's past performance with regard to individual rights doesn't leave much hope that conditions for enemy combatants will meet the standards expected from the international community. Majid's family hasn't seen him in years. No one has proved he has done anything wrong. Majid lived and paid taxes in America, but if the MCA is allowed to stand, Majid will never be able to stand up in a court of law and challenge his accusers and the Bush Administration will never have to tell us why they took Majid in the middle of the night.

The Center for Constitutional Rights (CCR) in New York has taken the case of Majid Khan, claiming that the Military Commissions Act is unconstitutional. The US Constitution allows for the suspension of the writ of habeas corpus only in times of rebellion and invasion, CCR argues, and since this is neither, Majid should be given his day in court. As of this writing, Majid Khan has yet to be allowed to meet with his attorneys. The MCA is the latest and most frightening erosion of individual rights by the Bush Administration. It targets non-citizens with the worst of its punishments, but as with many other pieces of legislation in the past, the MCA is likely to extend its reach if it is allowed to stand. If the courts of the congress do not overturn the MCA, there will be many other cases like Majid's of families torn apart by an unjust law.

Note: The Center for Constitutional Rights has done extensive work around the MCA. Check out their website: www.ccr-ny.org
Resources:

All of Us Or None
1540 Market St. Ste. 490
San Francisco, CA 94102
Phone: 415-255-7036 Ext. 337
www.allofusornone.org

American Friends Service Committee
1730 Franklin St., Ste. 212
Oakland, CA 94612
510-238-8080
http://www.afsc.org/pacifi cmtm/oakland.htm

Center for Constitutional Rights
66 Broadway, 7th Floor
New York, NY 10012
Phone: (212) 614-6464
Fax: (212) 614-6499
E-Mail: info@ccr-ny.org
www.ccr-ny.org

Committee for the Defense of Human Rights
P.O. Box 90221
Pasadena, CA 91109
(415) 226-1120
www.cdhrsupport.org

Prison Moratorium Project
(559) 916-4370
1055 N. Van Ness Ave., Suite C,
Fresno, CA 93728
www.calipmp.org

To order a copy of Beyond Prisons:

Our friends at AK Press carry the following books discussed in this issue:
Golden Gulag: Prisons, Surplus, Crisis and Opposition in Globalizing California by Ruth Wilson Gilmore
Soledad Brother by George Jackson
Blood in My Eye by George Jackson
Still Black, Still Strong: Survivors of the War against Black Revolutionaries by Mumia Abu-Jamal, Doruba Bin Wahad, and Assata Shakur

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Below is information for prisoners about ordering from AK Press:
Please be aware that prisons have different regulations about what you can order. You are responsible to know those regulations and order accordingly. If items you order are rejected by the prison and returned to us, we will issue a credit memo for your purchase. However, if the prison does not return the order, we cannot issue a credit. Unfortunately, you order at your own risk. While we cannot afford to send free books to prisoners, we do offer a 30% discount on all items shipped directly to prisoners. For free books, contact the Prisoners Literature Project c/o Bound Together, 1369 Haight Street, San Francisco CA 94117.

Critical Resistance's mission is to build an international movement to end the prison industrial complex (PIC) 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. We are always looking for good pieces that help strengthen our abolitionist understanding and practice. We seek letters, opinions, articles, and artwork that move us closer to that goal. Some guiding questions for the next issue are: What are the biggest barriers people coming home from jail and prison face? What strategies could we use to break down those barriers?

Submission Guidelines For The Abolitionist

DEADLINE FOR THE NEXT ISSUE IS: July 6, 2007

The Abolitionist accepts:

• Reproducible artwork (desperately needed!)
• Letters (250 words)
• Short Articles (250-750 words)
• Questions you have about abolition
• Strategies for advocating for prisoners (jailhouse lawyering or other)
• Useful resources with contact information and description
• Important legal and administrative news
• International, national, and local organizing efforts and prison news

Note that we WILL edit your piece for content, length and clarity unless you tell us not to! If you do not want your piece edited, write a note on your submission indicating that no changes should be made. In this case, however, it might not be used. Also clearly note if you want us to print your full name and address, just your initials and city, or to simply have it remain anonymous. Unfortunately, we will not be able to respond to or publish every submission we receive and will be unable to return them unless prior arrangements are made. What we can promise is that we will read everything that comes in and use it to inform our overall work.

Once again, the DEADLINE FOR THE NEXT ISSUE IS:


Please let us know if you would like to be involved in producing the paper, OR if you have questions about what to write for the paper. Also, please forward family members and friends’ mailing and email (this option is cheaper for us) addresses who you want to receive the newspaper or who might want to get directly involved in working on it. We are still in the process of securing funding for this project. If you would like to contribute please send money or stamps to: CRITICAL RESISTANCE/JUSTICE NOW/ 1904 FRANKLIN STREET, SUITE 504/OAKLAND, CA 94612.

In solidarity,

The Abolitionist Editorial Collective

*Currently CR does not have the capacity to provide legal services, job placement, or housing placement *
CONTINUED FROM PAGE 7

If we look back to the late 1800s and the turn of the century, we can see that for example, the Nationalist Party in South African deliberately modeled its policies on Jim Crow law in the United States to set up their legal system of apartheid. They didn’t just kind of do something that was similar, because white people have a certain attitude against people of African descent. Not at all. They looked at a set of laws in the U.S. and said that’s the outcome we want. Let’s do that. And they did that in the context of technology transfer. They had engineers from California in Southern Africa helping them figure out how to squeeze more value from the land and squeeze more value out of the labor of people on the land. The point is not that there is not a connection I make anything of the book, is very important for me. Everyone is racialized, including white people, rather than white people do the racializing and everybody else catches it like a bad cold or something. And typically the case, the U.S. has always been racist, then the question of why prisons now still has been answered in a complicated way, because if prisons are just a natural extension of government then what we experience today as something horrifyingly new wouldn’t be horrifyingly new. It would have been consistent throughout the history of the country. So the horrifyingly new compels us to think about racialization and racism freshly.

Race, the remnants of the struggle over the ability to have some determination over your life, [is] made. We can see it really clearly today in what’s happening to people who are Muslim. In fact, in that hello, people who are in prison or jail or have been in prison or jail, who have been in prison, and so forth. That is a form of making power in so far as peoplemaking power through fugitivity -- through secret then communicate that to others inside and outside. That is a form of making power in so far as people who use needles to inject drugs is making power. People have got to do something that we used to do is hand over a human sacrifice to our opponents in order to win. There are 2.3 million people in prison and jail. Prisons are machines for mass production of human sacrifice. It’s not just this idealist fantasy of somehow people who are in prison or jail or have been in prison or jail and low wage workers to organize. This is all part of a single process that is trying to find the large-scale solution to the sort of social problems that the world’s working people are encountering every single day.

CR: In the section, “What Is to Be Done?” you lay out ten theses. One that stands out for me is this concept of making power rather than taking power.

RWG: Some years ago, I was talking with some people who were talking about “We must take power here and take power there,” and I thought, what does that even mean anymore? Does it mean get elected to something and if so, does it mean get elected to something in a way that you wouldn’t be the sole voice for X on a legislative body whether it’s a local school board or the U.S. Senate? Does it mean stage a sit down and stop a place from working? What does it mean to take power? Maybe what we ought to be thinking about is how we make power. How do we put our collective efforts together such that what we do is always moving in some way toward the greater purpose however we do it? One thing that came to mind is the way stop thinking in terms of harm, punishment, harm, punishment, and we start thinking along with our inspired allies over in the Harm Reduction Coalition about reducing harm. I don’t know how many people who use needles to inject drugs is making power. That’s a really simple example. It’s cheap and it works.

It’s not just this idealist fantasy of somehow taking over the world without having to fight the black mass of people who use needles to inject drugs is making power. That’s a really simple example. It’s cheap and it works. People have got to do something that we used to do and we got frightened away from doing, and that is to grasp the radical potential of what it is we’re talking about. People have got to do something that we used to do and we got frightened away from doing, and that is to grasp the radical potential of what it is we’re talking about. I said in the earlier part of this interview that we live in a time and a place where just throwing our fists up into the air and saying the system destroys. But that doesn’t mean that you don’t have your fist raised in your heart and while turning every aspect of everyday life. People are being criminalized who haven’t been criminals before. So rather than people who are working in public sector unionism or in immigrant rights activism thinking that what they’re struggling for is different from anti-prison activism, I would hope that such people could see more and more and more that what enabled the growth of prisons is exactly what is enabling the growth of immigrant detention centers or work that undermines the possibility for public sec- tor and low wage workers to organize. This is all part of a single process that is trying to find the large-scale solution to the sort of social problems that the world’s working people are encountering every single day.

CR: For readers who might be interested in lending their energy and brilliance to fighting prison expansion in California, what can they do?

RWG: There are many organizations that exist. For people inside and outside there are orga- nizations like California Prison Moratorium Network, the U.S. Senate? Does it mean stage a sit down and stop a place from working? What does it mean to take power? Maybe what we ought to be thinking about is how we make power. How do we put our collective efforts together such that what we do is always moving in some way toward the greater purpose however we do it? One thing that came to mind is the way stop thinking in terms of harm, punishment, harm, punishment, and we start thinking along with our inspired allies over in the Harm Reduction Coalition about reducing harm. I don’t know how many
February 21, 1966 is the date of my rebirth. I was born again after hearing the life teachings of Malcolm X.

I was a junior in Crane High School in Chicago when my geography teacher, Mr. Vernado, told the class that we shouldn't come to class on the 21st, indeed, not to come to school period. One of my classmates asked why and Mr. Vernado explained that that was the day of the martyrdom of Minister Malcolm X, and in honor of his memory and contribution to the struggle for Negro (that's what we were called then) rights.

Another student asked what church did this minister belong to, and if he was Malcolm 10, where were the other 9? After a brief laugh, Mr. Vernado explained that Minister Malcolm was not a member of any church; that he was a Muslim and belonged to the Nation of Islam. He further explained that he wasn't Malcolm 10, but Malcolm X. Malcolm, he said, had decided to drop his last name and replace it with X to symbolize the lost African name that had been stolen from us when we were brought to this country as slaves. Malcolm's former last name was an indication of his rejection of the name of his former slave master, the white man, and he didn't identify with it. Anyway, Mr. Vernado said, we shouldn't come to school on that day, in honor of this great man.

Well, I came to school that day. There was no way my grandparents would have let me stay home to honor some minister who wasn't from our church and they didn't know. School was a priority in our house, and even if we were sick, they insisted that we place school first and church second. So I went to school that day. I didn't attend any classes, but while I was roaming the halls, I accidentally ran into Mr. Vernado.

He seemed very upset when he saw me and grabbed me by the arm and literally dragged me down the hall to his classroom. Once there, he slammed the door and asked me why I was there. I didn't understand what he had said yesterday! I said I didn't and anyway, I couldn't tell my grandparents that I wasn't going to go to school to honor someone they didn't know. Mr. Vernado just shook his had, reached into his desk drawer and pulled out a copy of the Autobiography of Malcolm X and shoved into my hands and demanded that I read it. He said that my final grade in his class depended on it. I've always been a reader, so I didn't see that as difficult. He also told me that he wanted me to show up later because he had something else he wanted me to see. Later that day, when I returned to his class, Mr. Vernado showed me a film, "Prospects for Freedom, 1965." Seeing, hearing and reading Minister Malcolm X changed the direction of my life forever.

Years later I was imprisoned for 22 years 7 months and 22 days for activities that supported the liberation struggle. While a prisoner of the state of Illinois, I witnessed how "corrections" really worked. It is nothing like we see in the movies or read in magazines. It is a psychologically, spiritually damaging place, and there were times when things were so bad that it was hard to believe that someone had authorized this to punish others who had broken the law. It is a place were aloneness reigns supreme, alienation reaches its highest heights, and the few programs and educational opportunities do little to nothing to challenge or change the behaviors of those imprisoned or those who imprison them. I tried to address several injustices that I had witnessed.

In the early years eating in the dining hall was horrible, nothing green except the mold on the bread, so I assisted in organizing a food strike until they put fruits & vegetables on the line. I worked with other prisoners to enhance educational opportunities after Bill Clinton, president of these United States cut federal funding (Pell Grants) to prisoners (we worked with university staff to try and find alternative funding sources). I organized and stocked the prison library; assisted and organized conflict resolution strategies and programs for those imprisoned; and, assisted in the organization of the recognition of Black History Month activities and programs, and shared this information so that others could do so.

After experiencing all those years in the Illinois Department of Corrections, I have come to the conclusion that prisons are antiquated relics of the past. They serve no purpose except to warehouse certain people. Whatever their historical value, they do not serve to "rehabilitate" those placed inside them, those who are economically forced to work in them, or make a safe society. They have become tools of profit for stockholders on Wall Street, and the division and destruction of persons, families and communities. Prisons do not repair damage done by those who have wronged others and torn the fabric of community. Prisons should be abolished.

375 Million Reasons

I've been on the inside trying to look outside for alternatives. I've heard of this jail that's trying to be built in the south Bronx, and I don't see how we can invest in a jail before housing, or schools, or mother and child programs which is where I reside today.

If they want to invest in jails, then invest in getting them books, and supplies and programs in the jails. Not build another one. There's too many already. The United States is supposed to be the largest penal colony in the world. We can do with one less jail.

I reside today at a mother and child program in the South Bronx. Why not buy us some books, fund trips and toys for our children? We as mothers could use supplies and activities. We can definitely use funding for our facility along with a lot of other mother and child programs and facilities.

Just for today, I seem to be facing a situation where I need an alternative to the current residential program I'm in. I need another facility, like the one I'm currently in, or a family shelter for me and my child. I'm sure there are many family shelters that can use funding before spending it on a new jail. Just for today, I'm now at a crossroad, because there aren't a lot of alternatives for me and my son. Not only is the money going to something the one I'm currently in, or a family shelter for me and my child. I'm sure there are many family shelters that can use funding before spending it on a new jail. Just for today, I'm now at a crossroad, because there aren't a lot of alternatives for me and my son. Not only is the money going to something we can definitely do without, here's something we can definitely say no to.

This jail is supposed to be built over toxic grounds hazardous to every adult's life in that prison. Even more importantly, they want to build a new jail. Just for today, I'm now at a crossroad, because there aren't a lot of alternatives for me and my son. Not only is the money going to something we can definitely do without, here's something we can definitely say no to.

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In the last issue of the Abolitionist we featured an interview with Pilar Maschi, about work she's been doing with women in a transitional residential facility to prevent a jail from being built in their neighborhood. Below, one woman engaged in that struggle adds her voice to the fight.

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