

The Abolitionist

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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 as a way of keeping those of us working for its elimination at a distance from its weak points.

In the pages of this issue of *The Abolitionist* the authors provide some windows into the maze that is the prison industrial complex. They suggest explanations and explorations that

help us peel away some of the layers of the system and look more deeply inside. Tommy Stevenson and Heba Nimr's pieces highlight how the prison industrial complex impacts people who are not citizens of the US even as they remind us of the potential the system has to reach all of us as it claims to aim for just a few.

Rose Braz and David Stein break down some recent Californian legislative news to explain what it means for people inside and their families and friends. Greg Thomas exposes the false promise of declassified FBI files and he, like Isaac Ontiveros, demonstrates that the US program against Black self-determination is far from over.

Laura Magnani and Ruthie Gilmore take 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.

1947 – Remember John Bowman – 2006

By Isaac Ontiveros

This winter, family, friends, and community members mourned the loss and celebrated the legacy of John Henry Bowman III. John Bowman died December 23, 2006. He was 59 years old.

John Bowman became politically active as a teenager working in the San Francisco Chapter of the Black Panther Party. There he worked in the free breakfast and community health-care programs, rent strikes and housing initiatives, as well as the Panthers' general efforts to broaden the movement nationally and internationally. Later in his life, continuing his work in the community, John would go on to become a founding member of All Of Us Or None—an organization providing resources and solidarity between former prisoners and those close to them as they struggle to rebuild their lives on the outside.

Running parallel to John's tireless work as a community organizer and activist is also a history of undying resistance to state repression. In response to his efforts as a young revolutionary in the Black Panther Party, John, like countless others, found himself the target of state terror-

ism. 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 resisters 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.



PHOTO BY SCOTT BRALEY

THE ABOLITIONIST

1904 Franklin St. Suite 504 Oakland, CA 94612

PHOTO BY ROSE BRAZ



BEYOND PRISONS: AN INTERVIEW WITH LAURA MAGNANI

Recently Critical Resistance sat down with Laura Magnani, the Assistant Regional Director of the American Friends Service Committee and co-author of *Beyond Prisons: A New Interfaith Paradigm for Our Failed Prison System* to talk about the book and opportunities for making lasting change. The following are excerpts from that conversation.

Laura Magnani: In the '70's the American Friends Service Committee wrote *Struggle For Justice*, which was an examination of sentencing systems around the country with a particular look at the indeterminate sentence system. It had an impact on the national dialogue on criminal justice particularly around sentencing, and had a part to play in illuminating the indeterminate sentence system.

We thought it was time to look at all the things we published over that 30-year period and see what we needed to say now. The more we looked at it, the more we realized that it was time for a comprehensive approach. We had over 45 years of experience in prison work as an organization and close to 90 years if you look at the death penalty work. We needed to be telling the story about the bankruptcy of the system and the fact that the system doesn't work. All the reforms and tweaking that have gone on over the decades haven't brought us closer to a system that works.

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

L.M.: 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.

C.R.: 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?

L.M.: 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.

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

L.M.: 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 glowing 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 horrible 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 underside. 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.

C.R.: 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?

L.M.: 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 get 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 pay in 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.

C.R.: Can you talk about how we engage victims or survivors?

L.M.: For decades the prison movement really ignored victims and really turned it's back on the serious brokenness and trauma and violence that victims have experienced. And by ignoring them not only were we not in fellowship with them and helping in their healing process, but we setting ourselves up for having someone else swoop in and use them and speak to their needs in some kind of way even if it was just a rhetorical kind of way. I still think we are pretty weak on it. But more and more victims' groups are coming along saying, "The system isn't helping me and I'm in favor of something different."

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE

Women's groups 20 years ago got very interested in tougher laws for rapists and then came full circle when they realized that sending men to prison for committing rape was not improving their safety at all. So women's groups were realizing that they were going down the wrong road and their interests had been hijacked by district attorneys and to get tougher procedures for trials [was] at their expense in the end. But it's hard; we have to have some pretty hard dialogues with groups to prevent that from happening.

The Service Committee wrote a pamphlet called "In a Time of Broken Bones," which [spoke] to lesbian, gay, bisexual communities that were calling for more hate crime legislation without realizing that hate crime legislation is much more often used against us rather than for our interests. Rather than stopping racism for instance, white supremacist groups use it for themselves. So you can't use this system to bring about wholeness. It doesn't work.

We should be dealing with our hate problem; we shouldn't be criminalizing it further, because that criminalization just creates more hate and violence. Those are deep dialogues that are hard to have. I think we have to really commit ourselves to having them and to looking for avenues where we can make common cause with victims' groups and walk with them.

If somebody's child is killed it's a hard walk to walk and people are afraid of that kind of grief. It's just too scary and hard and we really have to force ourselves to be with each other through that kind of pain if we are ever going to get to the other side. I don't think it's something you recover from, which is another bill of goods that the criminal justice system tries to sell to victims... that there is such a thing as closure. There isn't such a thing as closure to the death of a child or to traumatic events like this. It becomes part of the fabric of who you are. But we have choices to make about how we deal with that grief in our souls. It's hard work but we have to be there for each other.

CR: One of the amazing and hopeful things about the book is that it isn't just a critique of how horrible the system is, it lays out concrete steps people can make to change the paradigm of pun-

ishment and create a society where justice, safety and people's needs being met is at the center of our existence. Can you say a bit about the 12 points?

LM: Short of abolishing the whole penile system, a place to start is to abolish the death penalty, which is the centerpiece of the system and symbolizes that death is at the core; that if you really blow it we will kill you. That's the constant message the presence of the death penalty conveys to consumers of the system and it works on the souls of the people who are imprisoned as well as the people running those prisons.

Another aspect of the system that needs immediate abolition is solitary confinement. Whole institutions are being built for the sole

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.

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 pretty 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.

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 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 go 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 to not 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.

TRANSCRIPTION BY ARIEL CLEMENZI

Cruel and Unusual

Most prisoners and their families are unaware that:

The United Nations has a universally acknowledged standard for treatment of prisoners. The document is titled, "Body of Principles for the Protection of All Persons Under Any Form of Detention or Imprisonment." Although American courts have ruled that prisons here are not bound by the rules of the United Nations standards of humanitarian treatment for prisoners, the U.N. standard nonetheless remains the universal goal if not the current reality.

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 prohibit 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 they deem a threat, or whom they classify as unofficial trophies. These prisoners are held in catastrophically inhuman security housing units (SHU) in perpetuity. Many have been held in such conditions for three decades and more. A flash point of outrageous anger should boil in your veins when one considers that these SHU trophy prisoners are incarcerated for felony offenses as minor as common theft, drug possession, and crimes that resulted in no death or serious physical injury.

However, in a society that is continually evolving, one must hope that as time progresses, it will incorporate improved conditions for the prisoners. That time is long past due! Long live the spirit of resistance, unity, and solidarity.

By Charles C. James, Jr. (AKA Bomani)

FBI Pseudo-Declassification and George Lester Jackson

By Greg Thomas

George Lester Jackson also known as “Comrade George” and “The Dragon,” was first and foremost a revolutionary--a thinker of revolutionary ideas, an organizer of revolutionary bodies, a writer of revolutionary literature, a long-term political prisoner as a result of his revolutionary commitment, and a revolutionary icon and inspiration for his contemporaries and many more generations to come, most especially in Africa’s Diaspora. Jackson authored *Soledad Brother* in 1970 and *Blood in My Eye* (posthumously published) in 1972. He embodied the liberation struggle of the warriors of the 1960s and ’70s, and he was “the baddest of them all,” to quote Mumia Abu-Jamal.

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 prison 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 John Mills.” The prison guard Mills is the focus of importance, or value, for them. He was found dead after another guard had been absolved of killing three Black inmates and Black Guerrilla Family militants, W. L. Nolen, Cleveland Edwards and Alvin Miller. The state calls this kind of murder “justifiable homicide.”

Because they were militants, “Soledad Brothers” Jackson, Fleeta Drumgo and John Clutchette were charged with avenging this murder. “At the time of the assault, which resulted in the death of Officer Mills,” the FBI continues, “George Jackson was serving a term of one year to life in prison.” A conviction would have meant an automatic death penalty for Jackson as the absurd climax of an earlier conviction for allegedly stealing \$70 from a gas station at the age of 18, a conviction that was the result of a terrible plea-bargain.

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

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.

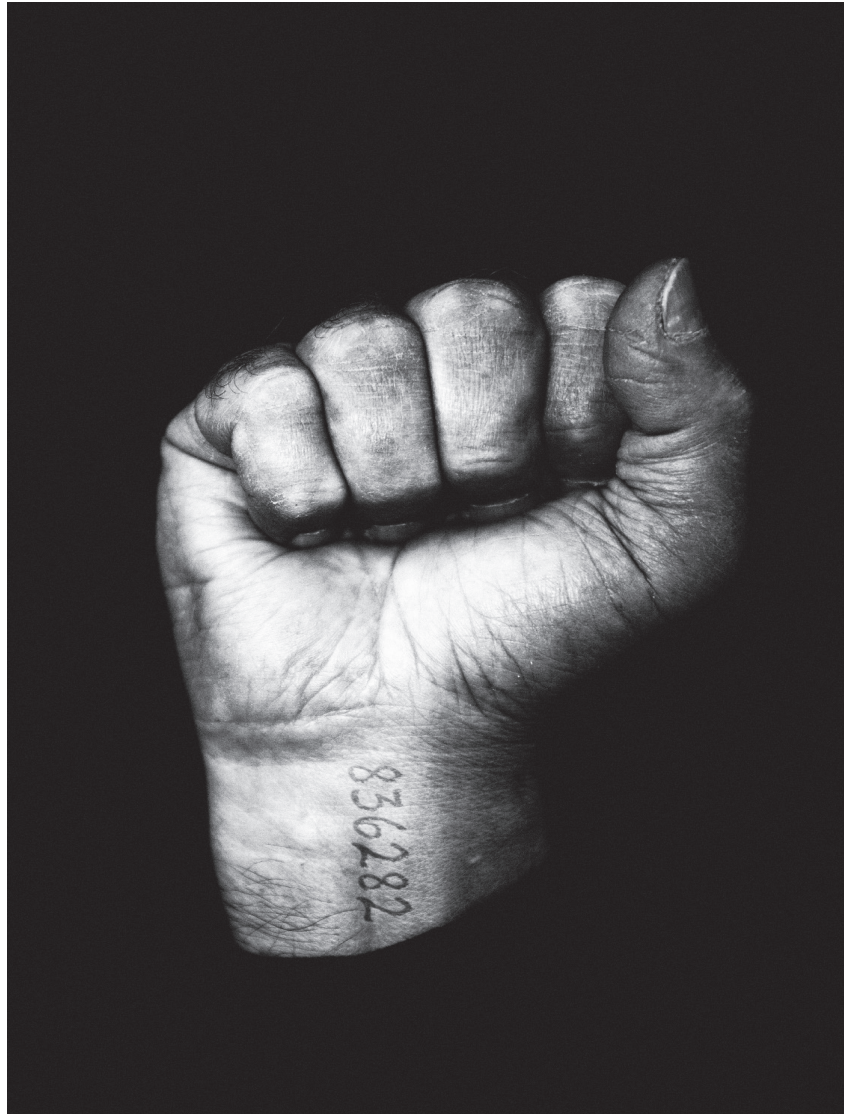
Third, there is a review of Jackson’s *Blood in My Eye*. This memoir-review is of immediate interest insofar as it presupposes the existence of files on George and his brother Jonathan Jackson that will never materialize under the guise of declassification.

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 autopsy 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 noteworthy. It smacks of the detention and diagnostic politics of “drapetomania,” 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 legitimize 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



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, in

Truly, wanting to be free is a “crime” and “disease” under the current historical order of things.

what became known as the “San Quentin 6” trial.

The internal contents of the released FBI file on George Jackson fall into four categories. First, there is the FBI’s support for the state of California in a civil action-suit launched by Jackson, Drumgo and Clutchette. The materials relevant to this topic amount to a pseudo-investigative denial. In this account inmate witnesses who agree to testify for the state are not reward-

CRITICAL CONDITION

VALLEY FEVER

Incidents of Valley Fever are common in Prisons in the southwest US and the Central Valley of California. I received a letter from Pleasant Valley State Prison reporting incidents of illness there among prisoners and staff, and discrepancies in medical attention. Below is some basic information on this illness.

Valley Fever is an illness caused by *Coccidioidomycosis*, a fungus that lives in the soil in the southwest 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 anti-fungal 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.

*Until then,
In Love and Solidarity,
liz*

Critical Condition
c/o Critical Resistance
1904 Franklin St., Suite 504
Oakland, CA 94612

Not Without a Fight: The San Francisco 8

By Isaac Onitveros

On January 23rd of this year, eight former Black Panthers were arrested and charged with the 1971 killing of San Francisco police officer Sgt. John Young as well as charges pertaining to alleged conspiracy activities in the late '60s and early '70s. Ray Boudreaux, 64; Richard Brown, 65; Hank Jones, 70; Richard O'Neal, 57; Harold Taylor, 58; and Francisco Torres, 58, were arrested in California, New York and Florida. Herman Bell, 59, and Jalil Muntaqim, 55, have been held as political prisoners in the state of New York for over 30 years. A ninth person, Ronald Stanley Bridgforth, is still being sought.

This case mirrors and is intertwined with the history of ongoing brutal state repression of any and all attempts for Black liberation in this country as we witness the state's attempts to re-legitimize the terrorist methods and tactics used in its infamous Counter Intelligence Program a generation ago. In no uncertain terms, the arrests of the San Francisco 8 are a testament to the continuing war against Black liberation struggles, present and future.

The basis of the case against the SF8 is rooted firmly in the history of state terrorism against liberation movements in the U.S. During the 1960s and 1970s, the COINTELPRO operation cut a bloody swath across the landscape of social and political upheaval as the FBI and local police forces used infiltration, harassment, frame-ups, imprisonment, torture, and assassination to neutralize liberation movements, leftists and political dissidents who were considered a threat to the domestic and international policies of the U.S. government. Some of the most vicious methods were reserved for members of the Black Panther Party, dubbed the greatest threat to the state at the time.

In an attempt to counter the efficacy of the organization, hundreds of Panthers were set-

up, pitted against one another, locked-up, and murdered. Although the Church Senate Committee investigated and publicized the crimes of COINTELPRO in the mid-1970s, no one at any level of law enforcement was ever held accountable for them. In fact, the methods and techniques of COINTELPRO persisted and its effects are still felt today, not least of all in the form of continued imprisonment of activists and liberationists from that time period.

The struggle of the SF8 stands in relief to this backdrop of state repression and imprisonment of dozens of effective organizers, theorists and revolutionaries locked in cages, cut off from their families, friends, communities and movements. As detailed by *The Abolitionist* several issues ago, in 1973, Harold Taylor, John Bowman (recently deceased) and Ruben Scott were arrested in New Orleans on charges nearly identical to the ones levied against the SF8 today. The New Orleans Police, assisted by other agencies and, namely, two San Francisco detectives, McCoy and Erdelatz, tortured these men over the course of several days. The near constant torture included electric shocks, cattle prods, beatings, sensory deprivation, plastic bags and hot wet blankets for asphyxiation, interrupted only by harsh interrogation. After several days of this seemingly endless duress and for fear of death, the men made "confessions" that were entirely scripted by their handlers and the police.

A federal court ruled that torture had been used illegally and a San Francisco Judge tossed out the case. Over time, the men publicly renounced their confessions and exposed the facts of their brutalization. Left physically and psychologically scarred, they continued to suffer a variety of afflictions related to their torture.

Nearly 30 years later, in 2003, emboldened by the overtly repressive post-9/11 climate and under the legal and political umbrella of Homeland Security legislation, the state decided to reopen the investigation of the 1971 murder of Sgt. Young. In a nightmarish twist, detectives McCoy and Erdelatz, along with the support and facilitation of the FBI, were put in charge of the investigation.

In the case of John Bowman and Harold Taylor, the former Panthers were confronted anew by the very men who had presided over their torture decades previous. Dozens of people all over the country were questioned; when the state's efforts proved unfruitful, grand juries were convened and subpoenas dished out in an attempt to compel cooperation. Men now in their 50s, 60s, and 70s, living mostly quiet lives, found themselves once again in the sights of the state. Not willing to go down without a fight, Ray Boudreaux, Richard Brown, Hank Jones, Harold Taylor, and John Bowman all refused to cooperate with the grand jury and were imprisoned for lengths of time spanning from 30 days to several months.

Boudreaux, Brown, Jones, Taylor, and Bowman understood their resistance to the grand jury system as a continuation of the struggles in which they had engaged as younger men. It was clear and articulated that those orchestrating the grand jury witch-hunt were the same forces that would always attempt to break any movement for black liberation.

Upon release from their jail terms, the former Panthers used their state-facilitated re-acquaintance (in some cases, after not having been in contact with each other for decades) and the momentum of their support network to found the Committee for the Defense of

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 of 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.

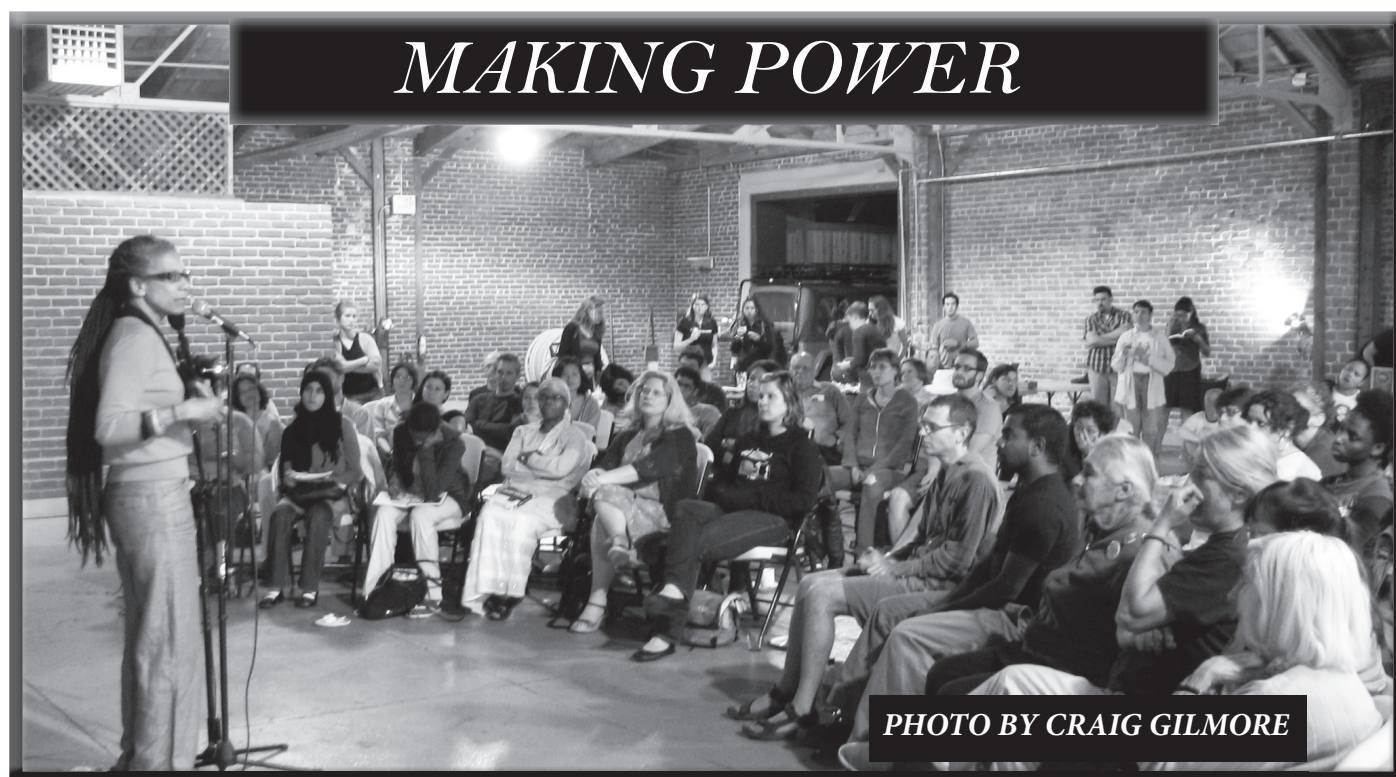
Critical Resistance: How did *Golden Gulag* develop?

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 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 be able 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-flung areas of our enormous state. In the midst of doing this work I went back to school because I needed to be able to get myself a regular job. While I was in school I thought I would just keep doing this research on the side and do something else to get my degree, but I had an advisor who was very interested in and open to my pursuing the research I was doing for the women's organization as my dissertation research, so I did. I was raised by activists and I've always been an activist, so it made perfect sense to me that everything I did in my life – going to school, doing my political work, being a teacher -- should be connected.

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 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?"



AN INTERVIEW WITH RUTH WILSON GILMORE

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 anyone 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?

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 met with covered ears and closed eyes. So 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: In the book you highlight the similarities between the communities from which prisoners come and the communities to which prisoners go to do time. I think that upsets the common sense not only of people who assume that imprisonment must be good economically for prison towns but also a common sense that's been developing around the idea that prison towns are really different demographically or ideologically from the urban places most prisoners are com-

ing from. Is California exceptional in that way?

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: 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: 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 brothers who grew up in a sharecropper family in Mississippi. When they saw a mechanical 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 United 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] draft more 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 govern-

ment, 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

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.

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 stared 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 buy houses, 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 unemployment, 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 guarantee 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.

CR: Related to the path we've been following around labor and jobs, one of the other things that you talk about is the welfare state and the role of different levels of government in providing for people. The concept of Keynesianism comes up over and over in your book. It might be an intimidating idea for people in terms of the language of it, so I'm wondering if you can break down. What is that and why is it relevant for your argument?

RWG: Keynes was an economist who did most of his important work in the 1920s and '30s. His name has become associated with a particular style of government. In a nutshell, Keynes and people who agreed with him were great believers in capitalism. But, they also saw that because of the way that capitalism works there would be a tendency for the companies that got big to swallow up the companies that didn't; for the companies that were successful to knock out of business the companies that were not, and that means that eventually there might be some level of monopoly. Third, they recognized that the nature of capitalism required that it would, from time to time, go into bad phases -- like what I've been describing earlier in the interview.

Now, they weren't the first to notice that capitalism goes in cycles -- good times and bad times are built into the system. Everybody who ever wrote a word about capitalism from the 18th Century forward wrote about this. The question was what to do about the bad times. Keynes and his guys and gals said when the economy starts to go badly and unemployment starts to rise or interest starts to get high or prices of things that people need start to get out of hand, that is the time for the government to step in and fix it by making sure that people who spend all of what they make have enough money to buy what they need. The definition of need could be broad. It could be buy what you need as in food that you need to eat, or might include buying a house.

So, Keynesianism describes the various kinds of government agencies and institutions whose job it was to make sure that people had protections from calamity and opportunities for advancement at times when the economy got bad as well as in good times. The reason that we attach military to military Keynesianism has to do with the fact that in the United States, unlike anywhere else in the overdeveloped world, a good deal of the government investment in people and jobs was very tightly tied to the United States permanent build up of an enormous military capability--the development of the Pentagon, the expansion of the five branches of the service, the development, as I said earlier, of many bases and intellectuals whose job it is to refine industrialized killing and decide who should be killed. Military Keynesianism is a kind of shorthand, although a long word, [to] describe the way that the welfare state in the United States is tied to the warfare state that is the United States.

CR: You talk about the racialized nature of prisoners in a really smart way. I think that's a smart use of political economy to demonstrate how who ends up in prison is not natural; it's not accidental.

RWG: The United States has always been racist. There's never been one millisecond in the history of this country in which this country has not been racist. The United States has led the way in laying out and developing the ideologies of race that in many ways are patterning the whole world, because of the U.S.'s military and economic might.

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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 Rehabilitative 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 Gagliani. 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.*

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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, Dhoruba Bin Wahad adds in *Still Black, Still Strong: Survi*

vors 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



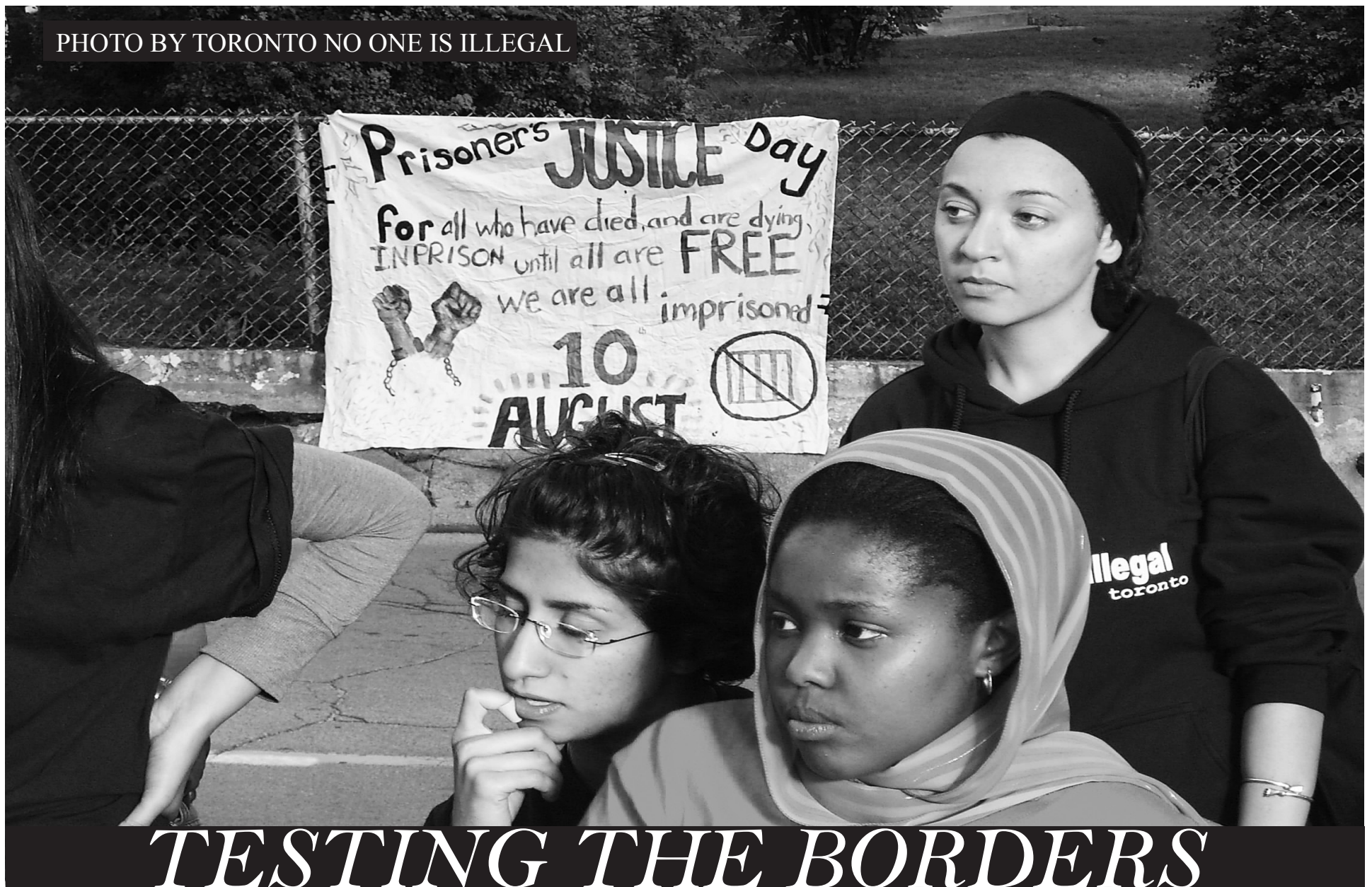
where these documents are in the recent pseudo-declassification of records is to ask a question to which the FBI will provide no real answer, surely.

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 "Amerikan 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.

PHOTO BY TORONTO NO ONE IS ILLEGAL



TESTING THE BORDERS

U.S. Immigration Policies Embedded Within The P.I.C. : By Heba Nimr

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 (IIRAIRA) were passed by Congress, and, together, these bills made many 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 grow-

ing 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 securi-

ty 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.

Understanding The Military Commissions Act

By Tommy Stevenson

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 asleep 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 do to 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.

What Is The MCA?

The Military Commissions Act (MCA) is a massive rewriting of the rules of detention and interrogation of people deemed by the Bush Administration to be enemy "combatants." The Bush Administration rushed the act through Congress in the months after the Supreme Court ruled in *Hamdan v. Rumsfeld* that the prisoners held by the Bush Administration were entitled to the protections of the Geneva Convention. According to the language of the act, it is designed to "facilitate bringing to justice terrorists and other unlawful enemy combatants through full and fair trials by military commissions, and for other purposes." When you read the act, however, the whole "full and fair" business gets a little squishy.

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

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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 re-write history and deny the evidence of the 1974 torture. Insisting there was no basis for the original dismissal of charges against the former Panthers, the state agents maintained that they were hunting down members of a violent terrorist organization in search for peace and justice for the slain officer. This is hardly the first reinvigoration of "investigations" into political crimes related to Black liberation.

In 2002, Jamil Al-Amin (formerly H. Rap Brown) was convicted and sentenced to life imprisonment for the murder of two sheriff's deputies in Atlanta. His conviction and trial were wrought with irregularities, inconsistencies and injustices and the chain of events leading to his imprisonment clearly politically motivated and coordinated by federal agencies. In 2003, Kamau Sadiki (formerly Freddie Hilton) was sentenced to life imprisonment plus 10 years for the murder of a police officer 30 years prior. Sadiki maintained his innocence throughout his trial and claimed that the state threatened him with the life-sentence if he did not cooperate in hunting down Assata Shakur (Sadiki is the biological father of Assata's child). Indeed, the state officially re-

classified Shakur herself as a "domestic terrorist" in 2005 and upped the bounty on her head to \$1 million. We may also note the assassination of Filiberto Ojeda Ríos, the Puerto Rican independentista who was shot and left to bleed to death during a FBI raid on his island home in 2005.

Whereas the FBI and CIA's counterinsurgency tactics have historically been shrouded in secrecy, the current brazenness of state-terror stands as a legitimization, even legalization, of the once clandestine methods. Given this emboldened methodology, the veteran functionaries carrying out the state's domestic terror operations are no coincidence: McCoy and Erdelatz are back on the job; the second Bush regime has 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 seeks simply to point to the real people, who consciously shape and execute policies of oppression.

History bears witness to the systematic repression of Black liberation in the US as run-

away and insurrectionist slaves, militant workers, civil rights activists, community organizers and liberation theorists have continuously come under the fire of the state's organized attempts to crush freedom struggles. This is overlaid a landscape of continued, relentless, social, economic and political oppression of poor people and people of color represented by unprecedented imprisonment rates, daily police brutality, environmental devastation, near-zero healthcare, and the disemboweling of educational infrastructure. The economic conditions of Black folks in this country are arguably worse now than they were a generation ago, the devastating fallout of hurricane Katrina serving as only one example of the state's total disregard for the lives of Black people.

As always, 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 counter-tide of resistance. With the case of the SF8, the state is attempting to demonstrate to current and future movements that it will spare no expense and disregard no method to quell resistance. However, acting in self-defense against this repression, 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.



PHOTO BY SCOTT BRALEY

piece by piece and try to figure out what it means.

The first part of the definition deals with people who have engaged in or supported hostilities against the US. When you first read this, it seems to be pretty straightforward. If you fight with the Taliban, or give Al Qaeda money, you're on the list. But the application of this could actually be much broader. What if you give money to a charity working with orphans in Lebanon and with your knowledge, one of the members of the board is a bigwig in Hezbollah? You could be in a world of trouble.

If giving money to a charity doesn't snag you, the second portion of the definition is even broader. The Combatant Status Review Tribunals (CSRTs) are review panels set up by the Bush Administration to decide whether or not someone is an enemy combatant. These are not courts of law. There is no jury. Hearsay evidence can be used against you, you have no right to counsel, and evidence received under "coercive" conditions is admissible. CSRTs are run by the military with rules the Bush administration has made up on the fly. They have little judicial oversight, and no recognition in the international community. But, decisions by the CSRT can mean the difference between freedom and indefinite detention. All it takes is the panel deciding that you intended to harm the United States, and your chance for a day in court is over.

Taken together, the two factors add up to an incredibly broad definition of what an enemy combatant could be. It would seem anyone who runs afoul of the Bush Administration could be labeled an enemy combatant. But, if you are not a U.S. citizen, you get the worst that the MCA has to offer.

What does this mean for non-citizens?

Short Answer – It isn't good news. The US Supreme Court has ruled 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.

Habeas corpus means "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. No one really knows the answer as to how far the Bush administration can stretch the term "enemy combatant." It seems clear that US citizens who the Bush Administration thinks are "engaged in hostilities or who has purposefully and materially supported hostilities against the United States" can be deemed enemy combatants, regardless of whether those hostilities take place in Afghanistan or Harlem. But how U.S. citizens will be treated once they are labeled enemy combatants is still not clear.

The best example we have of how a US citizen has fared after being labeled an enemy combatant is the story of Jose Padilla. Padilla was labeled "the dirty bomber" by the Bush administration and was 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 or-

der to be defined as torture, the actions of U.S. personnel must inflict "severe or serious physical mental pain or suffering." What exactly does this mean? According to the MCA, the actions must involve either "substantial risk of death," "extreme physical pain" or "significant loss or impairment of the function of a bodily member, organ or mental faculty." This is an extremely limited definition of torture. It would seem to allow for the continued use of so called "stress positions" or the use of other physically coercive interrogation techniques. If it is only torture if someone is at risk of losing life or limb, that leaves a lot of room for U.S. interrogators to maneuver.

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 tortured 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 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

*Articles included in **The Abolitionist** reflect the views of their authors and not necessarily those of Critical Resistance. We print*



opinions, ideas, and strategies we think are important to engage even if we don't happen to agree with everything the authors write.

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/pacificmtn/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:

http://www.afscstore.org/store/product_info.php?cPath=21_39&products_id=5195

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

To get a catalog of AK's books or to place an order, write to:

AK Press
674-A 23rd Street
Oakland, CA 94612

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 art-work 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:

July 6, 2007.

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 1890s and the turn of the 1900s, we see the ways, for example, the Nationalist Party in South Africa 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.

This connection, which is not a connection I make anything of in 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 if, as is 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 heinous show 24 the other night, the head of the counter terrorism unit, a white man, said of an Arab American employee, "so and so is being racially profiled because she's Muslim." That was in the script, which was written by somebody who decided that saying "racially profiled" and "Muslim" together would resonate with the show's audience as simultaneously new and familiar. My point is this is racialization. This is the process right here, and it is in the context of what exposing groups to particular vulnerabilities to premature death.

CR: What do you see as potential vulnerabilities in the system from an activist perspective?

RWG: The system has many vulnerabilities. They're hard to exploit because we're weak in terms of our numerical organization and the other side is strong because they have money, the media, and so forth. What we have going for us is that while our numerical organization might not be that great it's getting bigger everyday and there are more of us than there are of them. There are 2.3 million people in prison and jail in the United States. We represent, in our relationships with each other, perhaps tens of millions of people who are not in prison but who are close to people in prison, who have been in prison, and so forth.

Anti-prison activists on the inside and outside are under no illusion that we are advocating on behalf of a group of people who have any kind of general popularity in the United States, because we know that's not true. But we also know that many millions of people in the United States know people who are in prison or jail or have been in prison or jail and know better than to believe all the crap that's put across TV and radio that constantly demonizes people that have spent part or all of their lives inside cages. One of the things that I think we are doing around the country effectively is to connect anti-prison organizing with other kinds of large-scale organizing that has the purpose of making it possible for working people of all races and all genders to have better lives. This includes unions and faith organizations. This also includes, in particular, people who are struggling on behalf of the rights of immigrants and undocumented and documented

people who are not citizens of the United States.

These are some directions in which we can go and in fact we must go, because the way the political economy of prisons has transformed in the wake of 9/11 shows me that the kinds of prison-based solutions put into place between the 1980s and September 11th, 2001, are being generalized to many other areas of everyday life. People are being criminalized who haven't been criminalized 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 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 sector 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



that people in prison have, even under the most extreme duress, formed study groups over many years and learned way more about the system and how it works than a lot of people in the free world who have the leisure and opportunity to make study groups. That is a form of making power in so far as people who are inside have figured what's going on and then communicate that to others inside and outside.

After I came up with this scheme – making power -- it turned out it wasn't original at all, which made me really happy. People in a number of places that have recently come out from under large-scale racist or military dictatorships, for instance in Chile and Argentina, and South Africa, have also been focused on making power, and they've talked about doing it in terms of organizing communities to be more self-sufficient. For example, figuring out ways to solve, on a community level, problems without calling the cops. That's making power. Figuring out ways at the community level to be mindful and caring of each other such that if we see some trouble coming down the pike, doing something before it happens, so we

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. Distributing bleach among 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 being able to take over the world. But rather, it's through the ways we can do things in our lives already with the means we have at hand that we begin to summon the capacity to do more and more and more. An example I use really often is the example of slavery. In the United States the dominant view was slavery will never end. It can never really go away, because there are too many people dependent on it. It will never really go away because the U.S. is so racist.

It was through enslaved people and free people making power through fugitivity -- through secret study groups, establishment of independent communities, through taking the message around the widest areas possible, and fighting -- that slavery ended. Mr. Lincoln didn't free the slaves. Mr. Lincoln got put in a corner where the only thing Mr. Lincoln could do is what he did. We made the power that he then responded to, rather than he had the power and we got the gift.

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 organizations like California Prison Moratorium Project, which is organizing in Prison Alley in the central valley; Critical Resistance; and Families to Amend California's Three Strikes; and All of Us or None and many others that already exist.

I am in recovery and one of the things you learn in recovery is you've got to change your stinking thinking. One thing is to change is thinking that the system actually is legitimate, it's just a little broken. Instead we must think that the system isn't legitimate for us because what is does now is what it's supposed to do, which is to totally destroy the lives of people in prison and their communities, and along the way bring down the communities where prisons are built.

The second thing to stop thinking is that first what we have 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 human sacrifice. Us handing over a little human sacrifice -- deciding, for example, that certain kinds of convicts should never be included in our struggle for justice -- is not going to satisfy the hunger of the system for more human sacrifice. It's just not a strategy that works. What we need to do is talk about and act on

the ways in which human sacrifice is killing all of us.

Another example is, the brave and inspiring way that many women who are locked up in California prisons have stood up and written their names down, which is a much braver thing than hardly anyone does in the free world on any day. They've written their names down to say they are opposed to the expansion of women's beds in California. That expansion is being couched in very fancy, fluffy terminology about gender and responsive and correction and community whereas it is simply more prisons.

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 effort to undoing the system of human sacrifice. If we do this, it will become again what it was forty years ago, a symbol for self-respect and self-determination.

Coming Home

The Date of My Rebirth: By Yusufu L. Mosley, Critical Resistance Chicago

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 21 st, 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/our 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 was I there, didn’t I 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 head, 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 where 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.

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.

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 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 nursery inside of this jail, that’s built over toxic grounds.

Are they trying to save us or kill us?

It’s gonna cost 375 million dollars just to build this jail, and I can think of 375 million reasons why not to before I end this passage. Food for thought!

BY D

Contributors:

Rachel Herzing, Leah Furumo, Flaco, Andrea Salinas, Lani Riccobuono, Rose Braz, Ariel Clemenzi, Ruthie Gilmore, Tony Bennett, Jason Glick, Charles C. James, Jr., Hilary Klein, Laura Magnani, George C. Maher, Fernando Marti, Pilar Maschi, Annie Mathews, Leslie McLean, Rafael Mutis, Heba Nimr, Isaac Ontiveros, Sylvia Romo, Liz Samuels, Amy Smith, David Stein, Tommy Stevenson, Greg Thomas, Michael Callahan, Gabriel Torres, Alejandro Villasenor, Joseph Williams, Zap

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