

What Ever happened to that Lexington Suit

Article - Lexington Appeal Decision and Women Political Prisoners
by Susan Rosenberg

Picture: An underground basement containing 16 cells painted all white with no natural light. Wire mesh covering all windows making a view out impossible. No sound from outside. Eleven large rotating surveillance cameras. Electronic gates controlled from a command center in another building. Constant surveillance and controlled movement supervised by specially trained prison guards. Infrequent family visits. Two ten minute phone calls a week that were later listened to, recorded, transcribed, analyzed and forwarded to other law enforcement agencies for analysis. Sexual intimidation and constant harassment by male guards. Never more than five women in this place. | A psychological prison (torture center) in Uruguay? A scene from the film "A Clockwork Orange?" No! ^{This is} The U.S. Federal Bureau of Prisons (BOP) High Security Unit (HSU) at the women's federal correctional institution in Lexington, Kentucky, which opened in October 1986.

The HSU was officially shut down on August 15, 1988. During the almost two years it was operational, it held three women political prisoners: Alejandrina Torres (a Puerto Rican Independentista and Prisoner of War); Silvia Baraldini (an Italian national and anti-imperialist convicted of participating in the 1979 prison liberation of Black Liberation Army member Assata Shakur); and myself, Susan Rosenberg (a northamerican

We came together in Jan 87 to shut down the Control Unit (HSU) in Lex, Kentucky. Some of you may have read the full page ad (Coming Up - Aug 89) we placed in various fliers around, or or letters to editor. For 2

there was a struggle to close Lexington.

There was a suit vs. gov't which $\frac{1}{2}$ prisoners won the 1st round. of course to be expected gov't appealed + won. What happened

anti-imperialist convicted of weapons possession). Two other social prisoners - Debra Brown (currently on death row in Ohio) and Sylvia Brown (currently at the Marianna maximum security women's unit) were also subjected to the exper^{iment}~~iment~~. The administration unofficially informed the political women that we could only be considered for transfer into general population if we would renounce our political affiliations and beliefs. At the same time, the two social prisoners were told that if they did not associate with the political women, their stay in the HSU would be considerably shortened. None of the political women were placed in the HSU for disciplinary infractions committed while in prison.

The HSU ~~came to~~ symbolize the U.S. government's hypocrisy: while it claimed that it had no political prisoners in its prisons, the HSU was the first explicitly political prison. It was the subject of militant opposition initiated by the Puerto Rican Independence Movement that included groups ranging from social justice oriented church groups to radical women and lesbian groups. The HSU was condemned by Amnesty International as small group isolation, an internationally recognized form of psychological torture -- ~~and it~~^{and} was closed officially by a court ruling from the legal ~~challenge~~^{suit} in Baraldini v. Thornburgh.

^{NP} Judge Barrington Parker concluded in his decision, "It is one thing to place persons under greater security because they have escape histories and pose special risks to our correctional institutions. But consigning anyone to a high security unit for

past political associations they will never shed unless forced to renounce them is a dangerous mission for this country's prison system to continue."

On September 8, 1989, the U.S. Court of Appeals in Washington, D.C., overturned the Parker decision.

The appeals court held that the government is free to use the political beliefs and association of prisoners as a basis for treating us more harshly and placing us in maximum security conditions. Further, the appeals court ruling means that no court can question or dispute the prison's decisions even if those decisions explicitly involve the prisoner's politics or political identity.

This legal decision gives official sanction to the BOP to place political prisoners into control units. A control unit is a prison block within a prison that isolates prisoners in them. There is no movement in the units, and they are designed to break the prisoner through sensory deprivation and control. The control unit is the U.S. equivalent of the West German or British "dead wings" or "white cells." The appeals court ruling will also effect Marion penitentiary for men, where prisoners have been locked in their cells 23 hours a day for over five years. Marion has also been condemned by Amnesty International, and it is also used as a control unit for political prisoners and prisoners of war. While Marion is supposedly a punishment facility, a growing number of political prisoners have been designated there directly from trial. The new Lexington legal

decision allows the BOP to build more control units and to carry out this "mission" against the government's political opposition. All the government has to do is label someone a "terrorist" or a "security risk" and they can be subject to the most repressive prison conditions and human rights violations.

The BOP never acknowledged the condemnation of the conditions at the HSU. They continued to maintain that the conditions were "humane." They never complied with the original court order enjoining them to transfer the women held at the HSU into general populations. Instead, they built a new "maximum security" unit for women inside the men's federal prison in Marianna, Florida. The "mission" of the BOP at Lexington will be carried on in a slightly more palatable form at Marianna. This "mission" is one part of the overall program of the BOP to increase regimentation, control, and repression against all women in prison.

Since 1980, a growing number of women have been arrested and given long sentences for political actions against the government, including Puerto Rican, Black and Northamerican revolutionaries. Now that the transfer of political prisoners to the Marianna prison has been approved by the appeals court decision, it is just a matter of time before some, if not all, are sent there.

The political campaign that was crucial in bringing the pressure to close the HSU is needed again. For more information contact the Washington Area Committee for Political Prisoners'

Rights, P.O. Box 28191, Washington, D.C. 20038; or Freedom Now! Campaign for Amnesty and Human Rights for Political Prisoners in the United States, 5249 N. Kenmore, Chicago, Illinois 60640.

The U.S. government continues to deny that there are political prisoners in its jails -- just as it denies that there are deep social problems within our society. Yet the same government that hopes to make it a crime against the state for women to control our own bodies is also trying hard to destroy women political prisoners and our commitments and identities.

We will continue to resist. Your support will make a critical difference.

Susan Rosenberg
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and Resistance Conspiracy Case
defendant