

**National Campaign to Stop Control Unit Prisons  
How To Packet**

# NATIONAL CAMPAIGN TO STOP CONTROL UNIT PRISONS

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Dear Friend:

We appreciate your interest in participating in the Monitoring Committee of the National Campaign to Stop Control Unit Prisons. Welcome to the Campaign! If you are unfamiliar with the National Campaign, please read the informational brochure about our activities.

The materials enclosed are called the "How To" Packet, and will explain the task of monitoring a prison. Please look over the enclosures and see if they provide adequate information for your needs. Your regional coordinator is expecting that you will call or write to go over any questions and share ideas and problems before you begin. Please make use of the regional monitors or other Campaign members. They have lots of experience and want to help you get started.

There are various ways to get started monitoring a control unit or supermax prison. What you do will depend on your knowledge, resources, time and previous contacts with prisoners and the activist community. We will help in any way we can to link you up with useful tools for the task ahead. Remember that the monitoring work has three purposes:

- the collection of accurate information on the nature and purposes of each control or supermax unit in the United States
- the building of a community of activists outside the prisons
- the formation of strong bridges between the community and prisoners

There are many sources of information about control units, but the most important source are the prisoners who live the daily abuses inside. It is a priority of each monitor to contact prisoners and get the data in the first person. Prisoners are usually happy to help out. It is essential to remember that prisoners, especially those in long-term lockdown, have many needs. They need legal help, money, social contact and even love. Most prisoners are straight-forward and honest in their dealing with community advocates. The clearer you are about what you are doing, what you want and what you can provide, the better your inside-out communications will be. We suggest at the outset you keep a very narrow perspective and pleasantly refuse to send in stamps, paper, money, legal help, pictures, etc. As your group grows and your contacts with prisoners deepen, you will find your own way and develop your own priorities.

Most of all, try to visit prisoners in the isolation unit and contact their family members and loved ones. That is an expression of commitment that everyone understands and responds to.

Personal visits can be arranged with particular prisoners, and legal visiting can be organized under the supervision of attorneys willing to cooperate. Each State has different rules and regulations, and we can help you contact others in your locale who know the ropes.

Other sources of information include the Department of Corrections through its public relations office and annual reports, local activist organizations like CURE, ACLU or the National Lawyers Guild Prison Project. Each State has different names for what the National Campaign calls a control or supermax unit. Some names are: Administrative Maximum Unit (Ad-Max), Maximum Control Complex (MCC), Special Management Unit (SMU), Security Housing Unit (SHU), Intensive Management Unit (IMU), Management Control Unit (MCU), adjustment Center (AC), or simply Administrative or Disciplinary Segregation (Ad-Seg).

When we first began the Campaign, we were under the impression that control units were proliferating rapidly. As a result of monitoring work, we are finding that it is supermax units that are proliferating rather than control units. In the early discussions of the Campaign, we defined a control unit as one in which there was no entrance criteria. In other words, in a control unit people haven't received any charges. Generally speaking, in a supermax, charges have been rendered. While the conditions in both the control units and the supermax prisons are the same, the stated purposes are not. Simplistically put, the supermax is seen as punishment and the control unit is not. The control unit is seen as an administrative security measure which is not connected to any prisoner infraction, real or imagined. As a result of the expansion of supermax units, the Campaign sees supermax prisons as an expansion of control units, both using isolation as a management "technique". For those working in states where there are both control units and punitive isolation units, the distinction is relevant. For those who are in states where you are only dealing with supermax issues, the distinction is not as relevant.

Each Department of Corrections issues Administrative Regulations that govern the workings of the prison. Also each prison has its own rules in something like an operational Memorandum or Manual. Those rules and regulations are important to get. so you can compare fact to written regulation, and decode the various complaints the prisoners have. It is also useful to get all the basic data about the control unit or supermax from the DOC, like size, cost, number of cells,, etc. You can even request a roster of all prisoners in the Unit, just to see what the DOC says.

The National Campaign has a detailed questionnaire that can be sent in to prisoners. It is an excellent tool for getting information about the use of isolation in the particular

prison. Below are the names and number of the regional coordinators. Good luck and we all look forward to hearing from you.

Midwest Region: CO, NE, OK, LA, TN, IN, MI, WI, MN, MO, IA, ND, SD, AR, KS, IL

Michelle Foy, Rocky Mtn. Peace Center, PO Box 1156, Boulder, CO 80306  
303-444-6981

West Region: ID, MT, WY, HI, AK, CA, OR, UT, AZ, NM, TX, NV, WA

Cory Weinstein, PO Box 2218, Berkeley, CA 94702  
415-452-3359

East Region: NJ, DE, DC, FL, GA, AL, WV, NC, SC, VA, OH, PA, KY, NY, NH, MA, RI, ME, VT, CT, MD

Bonnie Kerness, AFSC 972 Broad St. Newark, NJ 07102  
201-643-3192

Please feel free to call any one of us.

Sincerely,

Michelle Foy, Monitoring Project

Bonnie Kerness, Coordinator

**REPORT**

**STATE** \_\_\_\_\_

**I. DOC:**

Address/Phone Number of DOC: \_\_\_\_\_

Director: \_\_\_\_\_

Public Information Contact: \_\_\_\_\_

Total # of people incarcerated in DOC \_\_\_\_\_

**II. Control Unit(s) in State**

Address/Phone Number of CU \_\_\_\_\_

Warden: \_\_\_\_\_

Public Information Contact: \_\_\_\_\_

Free-standing facility/internal unit: \_\_\_\_\_

Date opened: \_\_\_\_\_

Capacity (Men & Women): \_\_\_\_\_

Cost of construction of CU \_\_\_\_\_

Annual per prisoner maintenance cost: \_\_\_\_\_

# of prisoners released from CU last year: \_\_\_\_\_

CU prisoners paroled/released straight from CU: \_\_\_\_\_

Expansion: (Y/N)(date)(size of expansion) \_\_\_\_\_

Average term in CU (in months) \_\_\_\_\_

=====  
Address/Phone Number of CU \_\_\_\_\_

Warden: \_\_\_\_\_

Public Information Contact: \_\_\_\_\_

Free-standing facility/internal unit: \_\_\_\_\_

Date opened: \_\_\_\_\_

Capacity (Men & Women): \_\_\_\_\_

Cost of construction of CU \_\_\_\_\_

Annual per prisoner maintenance cost: \_\_\_\_\_

# of prisoners released from CU last year: \_\_\_\_\_

CU prisoners paroled/released straight from CU: \_\_\_\_\_

Expansion: (Y/N)(date)(size of expansion) \_\_\_\_\_

Average term in CU (in months) \_\_\_\_\_

**III. Practices and Conditions**

Classification Process: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Review Process: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**REPORT**

**STATE** \_\_\_\_\_

**I. DOC:**

Address/Phone Number of DOC: \_\_\_\_\_  
Director: \_\_\_\_\_  
Public Information Contact: \_\_\_\_\_  
Total # of people incarcerated in DOC \_\_\_\_\_

**II. Control Unit(s) in State**

Address/Phone Number of CU \_\_\_\_\_  
Warden: \_\_\_\_\_  
Public Information Contact: \_\_\_\_\_  
Free-standing facility/internal unit: \_\_\_\_\_  
Date opened: \_\_\_\_\_  
Capacity (Men & Women): \_\_\_\_\_  
Cost of construction of CU \_\_\_\_\_  
Annual per prisoner maintenance cost: \_\_\_\_\_  
# of prisoners released from CU last year: \_\_\_\_\_  
CU prisoners paroled/released straight from CU: \_\_\_\_\_  
Expasion: (Y/N)(date)(size of expansion) \_\_\_\_\_  
Average term in CU (in months) \_\_\_\_\_

=====  
Address/Phone Number of CU \_\_\_\_\_  
Warden: \_\_\_\_\_  
Public Information Contact: \_\_\_\_\_  
Free-standing facility/internal unit: \_\_\_\_\_  
Date opened: \_\_\_\_\_  
Capacity (Men & Women): \_\_\_\_\_  
Cost of construction of CU \_\_\_\_\_  
Annual per prisoner maintenance cost: \_\_\_\_\_  
# of prisoners released from CU last year: \_\_\_\_\_  
CU prisoners paroled/released straight from CU: \_\_\_\_\_  
Expasion: (Y/N)(date)(size of expansion) \_\_\_\_\_  
Average term in CU (in months) \_\_\_\_\_

**III. Practices and Conditions**

Classification Process: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Review Process: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**NATIONAL CAMPAIGN TO STOP CONTROL UNIT PRISONS (NCSCUP)  
MONITORING PROJECT QUESTIONNAIRE**

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name (optional)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Register Number (optional)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Today's Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Prison and unit name and address

\_\_\_\_\_  
Age

\_\_\_\_\_  
Race

\_\_\_\_\_  
Male/Female

\_\_\_\_\_  
Arrival Date

**(1) PLACEMENT IN CONTROL UNIT:**

- (a) Were you sent to control unit from court? \_\_\_\_Y \_\_\_\_N  
(b) Were you sent to control unit from another state? \_\_\_\_Y \_\_\_\_N  
(c) Were you sent to control unit from another prison? \_\_\_\_Y \_\_\_\_N  
    If so what was your level there? [ ] Comm. Corr. [ ] Camp [ ] Min. [ ] Med. [ ] Close  
[ ] Max. [ ] Control Unit  
(d) Was it a state prison or federal prison? \_\_\_\_State \_\_\_\_Federal  
(e) Reason why the DOC or prison staff placed you in control unit.  
    [ ] Administrative  
    [ ] Disciplinary  
(f) Reason(s) why you think you were placed in control unit. (optional)

\_\_\_\_\_  
(g) Have you ever been in a control unit before? \_\_\_\_Y \_\_\_\_N If yes when, for how long, and why? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
(h) How long were you in general population before transfer to control unit? \_\_\_\_\_

**(2) CLASSIFICATION HEARING AND CLASSIFICATION REVIEWS:**

- (a) Did you have a classification hearing **before** being sent to control unit? \_\_\_\_Y \_\_\_\_N  
(b) Were you sent notice of this hearing? \_\_\_\_Y \_\_\_\_N  
(c) Were you present at this hearing? \_\_\_\_Y \_\_\_\_N  
(d) What evidence was used by the prison staff to send you to control unit?  
    [ ] prison staff reports or testimony  
    [ ] prisoner testimony  
    [ ] confidential information  
    [ ] physical evidence  
    [ ] other \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
(e) Were you allowed to present evidence? \_\_\_\_Y \_\_\_\_N

\_\_\_\_\_  
(f) Were you allowed to challenge evidence against you? \_\_\_\_Y \_\_\_\_N

\_\_\_\_\_  
(g) What prison staff was present at the hearing? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
(h) Has your classification been reviewed since you've been in the control unit? \_\_\_\_Y \_\_\_\_N

(1) How often is it reviewed? \_\_\_\_\_

(2) Can you be present at the review? \_\_\_\_Y \_\_\_\_N

(3) Date of your last classification review. \_\_\_\_\_

(4) Did they tell you what you need to do in order to leave the control unit? \_\_\_\_Y \_\_\_\_N

(5) What do you have to do? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
(6) What reasons were given for keeping you at the control unit? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
(f) Do you know when you will leave the control unit? \_\_\_\_Y \_\_\_\_N

\_\_\_\_\_  
(h) Have you ever appealed being sent to the control unit? \_\_\_\_Y \_\_\_\_N

(1) How did you appeal? \_\_\_\_\_

- (2) Who reviewed your appeal? \_\_\_\_\_  
(3) What was the outcome? \_\_\_\_\_

**(3) PRISON CONDITIONS**

**(a) Cell:**

- (1) How big is your cell? \_\_\_\_\_  
(2) Does the bed have restraints or bracelets attached to it? \_\_\_\_\_Y \_\_\_\_\_N  
(3) Do you control the light in your cell? \_\_\_\_\_Y \_\_\_\_\_N  
(4) If not, when are the lights on? \_\_\_\_\_  
(5) What personal property do they allow in your cell? \_\_\_\_\_  
(6) Can you see outside from your cell? \_\_\_\_\_Y \_\_\_\_\_N  
(7) What kind of doors are on your cell? [ ] barred [ ] solid steel [ ] honey combed steel  
[ ] plexiglass [ ] combination  
(b) Can you smoke in the prison? \_\_\_\_\_Y \_\_\_\_\_N  
(c) Do you have a cellmate? \_\_\_\_\_Y \_\_\_\_\_N  
(d) How many hours a day are you in your cell? \_\_\_\_\_  
(e) Do you eat in your cell? \_\_\_\_\_Y \_\_\_\_\_N  
(f) Do you eat with others? \_\_\_\_\_Y \_\_\_\_\_N  
(g) Do you shower in your cell? \_\_\_\_\_Y \_\_\_\_\_N  
(h) How many times a week do you have yard? \_\_\_\_\_  
(1) Is yard outside, inside or both? \_\_\_\_\_  
(2) Do you have access to direct sunlight when exercising? \_\_\_\_\_Y \_\_\_\_\_N  
(3) Describe the area you exercise in and equipment if any. \_\_\_\_\_  
(4) Do you have yard with others? \_\_\_\_\_Y \_\_\_\_\_N  
(5) How much time do you have in the yard? \_\_\_\_\_  
(6) What happens if the weather is bad? \_\_\_\_\_  
(7) If you chose not to go to yard, why? \_\_\_\_\_

- (i) Are you allowed to talk to other prisoners from your cell? \_\_\_\_\_Y \_\_\_\_\_N  
(j) Are there a different levels with different "priveleges" in the control unit? \_\_\_\_\_Y \_\_\_\_\_N If so, please explain \_\_\_\_\_

- (1) If there is a step program, where are you in it? \_\_\_\_\_  
(k) Have you ever been forcibly removed from your cell? \_\_\_\_\_Y \_\_\_\_\_N  
(1) When? \_\_\_\_\_  
(2) Why? \_\_\_\_\_  
(3) How many prison guards were involved? \_\_\_\_\_  
(4) What type of weapons or protection did they have?  
[ ] batons [ ] shields [ ] tear gas/pepper spray [ ] stun guns [ ] other \_\_\_\_\_  
(5) Was the forced cell extraction video taped? \_\_\_\_\_Y \_\_\_\_\_N  
(6) What were you written up for? \_\_\_\_\_  
(7) Were you found guilty? \_\_\_\_\_Y \_\_\_\_\_N  
(8) Describe any injuries. \_\_\_\_\_

- (l) Have you ever been physically restrained? \_\_\_\_\_Y \_\_\_\_\_N  
(1) What kind of restraints were used? \_\_\_\_\_  
(2) How long were you restrained? \_\_\_\_\_  
(3) Why were you restrained? \_\_\_\_\_  
(4) What were you written up for? \_\_\_\_\_  
(5) Were you found guilty? \_\_\_\_\_Y \_\_\_\_\_N  
(6) Were you beaten while restrained? \_\_\_\_\_Y \_\_\_\_\_N  
(7) Describe any injuries. \_\_\_\_\_

- (m) Other than what's listed have you ever been assaulted by a guard since you've been in the control unit?  
\_\_\_\_\_Y \_\_\_\_\_N Describe \_\_\_\_\_

- (n) Have you ever been assaulted by another prisoner while in control unit? \_\_\_\_\_Y \_\_\_\_\_N If yes by:  
\_\_\_\_\_ Cell mate \_\_\_\_\_ Other \_\_\_\_\_



**(4) PRIVILEGES AND SERVICES**

- (a) Are educational classes available in the control unit? \_\_\_\_Y \_\_\_\_N  
(1) What kind? [ ] GED [ ] College course correspondence [ ] Other \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
(2) Is there a teacher available to you at the control unit? \_\_\_\_Y \_\_\_\_N  
(3) Are classes available only over the TV? \_\_\_\_Y \_\_\_\_N
- (b) Is job training available at the control unit? \_\_\_\_Y \_\_\_\_N  
(1) What kind? \_\_\_\_\_
- (c) Can control unit prisoners have a job? \_\_\_\_Y \_\_\_\_N  
(1) If yes, do you have a job? \_\_\_\_Y \_\_\_\_N What kind? \_\_\_\_\_  
(2) What are the rules for getting a job? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
(3) What's the pay per day or month? \_\_\_\_\_
- (d) Are religious services available at the control unit? \_\_\_\_Y \_\_\_\_N  
(1) For what religions? \_\_\_\_\_  
(2) Can prisoners attend religious services together? \_\_\_\_Y \_\_\_\_N  
(3) Are religious services available only on TV? \_\_\_\_Y \_\_\_\_N
- (e) Did you have a mental health evaluation before placement in the control unit? \_\_\_\_Y \_\_\_\_N
- (f) Have you had a mental health evaluation while in the control unit? \_\_\_\_Y \_\_\_\_N
- (g) Have you had mental health treatment in the control unit? \_\_\_\_Y \_\_\_\_N  
(1) What kind of treatment? \_\_\_\_\_  
(2) Is treatment/therapy offered on TV? \_\_\_\_Y \_\_\_\_N  
(3) When was the last time you saw someone from mental health? \_\_\_\_\_  
(4) Are you getting all the mental health services you need? \_\_\_\_Y \_\_\_\_N In not, explain \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
(5) Are you taking any medication for a mental health condition? \_\_\_\_Y \_\_\_\_N  
(6) For what? \_\_\_\_\_  
(7) How long have you been taking this medication? \_\_\_\_\_  
(8) Are you voluntarily taking this medication? \_\_\_\_Y \_\_\_\_N
- (h) Are you getting the medical services you need? \_\_\_\_Y \_\_\_\_N  
(1) If not, briefly explain \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
(2) Are there fees for the medical services? \_\_\_\_Y \_\_\_\_N
- (i) How often do you have access to the law library? \_\_\_\_\_  
(1) Are you allowed to make copies? \_\_\_\_Y \_\_\_\_N  
(2) Do you have access to a legal assistant? \_\_\_\_Y \_\_\_\_N  
(3) Do you have communication with Jail House Lawyers? \_\_\_\_Y \_\_\_\_N  
(4) Other comments. \_\_\_\_\_
- (j) Are you allowed visitors? \_\_\_\_Y \_\_\_\_N  
(1) Are the social visits contact or non-contact? \_\_\_\_\_  
(2) Are the attorney visits contact or non-contact? \_\_\_\_\_  
(3) Are you allowed privacy during attorney/legal visits? \_\_\_\_Y \_\_\_\_N  
(4) Do your visitors have problems with staff or getting the visits? \_\_\_\_Y \_\_\_\_N If yes, please explain \_\_\_\_\_  
(5) How often are you allowed visitors? \_\_\_\_\_  
(6) How long are the visits? [ ] 1 hour [ ] 1-2 hours [ ] 2-4 hours [ ] 4 hours or more  
[ ] other \_\_\_\_\_  
(7) Are visitors limited to people that you knew prior to your incarceration? \_\_\_\_Y \_\_\_\_N  
(8) Are children allowed to visit you? \_\_\_\_Y \_\_\_\_N  
(9) How many visiting days are there in the week? \_\_\_\_\_
- (k) How often are you allowed to use the telephone? \_\_\_\_\_  
(1) Are you allowed to make collect calls? \_\_\_\_Y \_\_\_\_N
- (l) How much money a month can you spend at the canteen? \_\_\_\_\_

- (5) Do you know of any legal cases concerning conditions or other issues against the control unit? \_\_\_Y \_\_\_N  
(a) If yes, what is the case name, number and jurisdiction? \_\_\_\_\_
- (6) Have you noticed any psychological changes since you have been in the control unit? \_\_\_Y \_\_\_N  
(a) Do you have problems with your ability to concentrate or focus? If so, please describe \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
(b) Do you have trouble reading? If so, please explain \_\_\_\_\_  
(c) Are you jumpy? Please describe \_\_\_\_\_  
(d) Are you sensitive to noise? Please describe \_\_\_\_\_  
(e) Are you irritable? Please explain \_\_\_\_\_  
(f) Do you have trouble remembering things? Please describe \_\_\_\_\_  
(g) Do you have thoughts you can't turn off? Please describe \_\_\_\_\_  
(h) Do you see things on the wall? Please explain \_\_\_\_\_  
(i) Do you see things that aren't really there? Explain \_\_\_\_\_  
(j) Do you have restlessness? Describe \_\_\_\_\_  
(k) Are you easily agitated? Describe \_\_\_\_\_  
(l) Do you have feelings of fear or paranoia? Please explain \_\_\_\_\_  
(m) Do you have feelings of anger or thoughts of violence? Describe \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

(7) Do you have any other major complaints or information that you think we should be aware of regarding the control unit?

(8) Please list the name, address and phone number of anyone (family member, friend, attorney) you think may be interested in monitoring the control unit, so we can contact them.

Thank you for your time.

**PLEASE RETURN QUESTIONNAIRE TO:**

**FROM ALCATRAZ TO MARION TO ADX FLORENCE: THE NIGHTMARE ESCALATES**

The federal Bureau of Prisons' new Administrative Maximum [ADX] Unit at Florence, Colorado, is being called "the Alcatraz of the Rockies". While Alcatraz was no picnic, prisoners there were permitted out of their cells for group activities--they ate together in a dining room; played together--cards, handball; were permitted to go in groups of over 200 to watch movies twice a month; held jobs in the prison, from industrial work to keeping the prison clean; moved about the prison unshackled and of their own volition--to meals, to yard, to movies, exchange clothing and linen; were allowed to paint in their cells; had access to chaplains for in person counseling; enjoyed fresh air and a magnificent view of the bay.<sup>1</sup> The Bureau's accommodations at ADX offer quite a different regime:

\* Lack of sensory stimulation. Prisoners are locked 22 hours a day in 7' x 12' cells described as "hermetic",<sup>2</sup> dead white with drab green trim. "Furniture" in the cell is gray concrete. With nothing to absorb the sound, the dead silence of the concrete is shattered by incessant echoes and the clanging of metal. Although the cells have windows, they provide no relief from the dead concrete emptiness, for "[t]he prison is even designed to deny inmates a view of the Rocky Mountains from their cells."<sup>3</sup> "All I

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<sup>1</sup>Morton Sobell, On Doing Time, (New York: Bantam Books, 1974), pp. 297-315.

<sup>2</sup>Francis X. Clines, "A Futuristic Prison Awaits the Hard-Core 400," New York Times, October 17, 1994, p. A1.

<sup>3</sup>Dennis Cauchon, "The Alcatraz of the Rockies," USA Today, November 16, 1994, p. 6A.

see is cement and steel," says Oscar López Rivera.<sup>4</sup>

\* Constant and intrusive surveillance. During their tenure at ADX, prisoners "will be kept on short leashes and monitored continually".<sup>5</sup> To aid in this monitoring, the prison, "a marvel of technology", has 168 video cameras.<sup>6</sup> Guards using hand-held video cameras follow the prisoners' every movement during outside recreation, and there are speakers through which guards can listen in on the cells. Multiple "searches" conducted in demeaning ways, including officers' kneading the body from head to toe, including tapping on the testicles, passing over the body with a hand-held metal detector before and after kneading. For a non-contact family visit officials required Oscar López to strip and be searched naked six times in addition to the kneading and metal detector searches, although the same officer accompanied him to and from the visit, he was never in contact with anyone but officers, and he was never out of their sight. During some searches the prisoners are also photographed naked and subjected to being x-rayed. Searches occur every time a person is taken out of the unit, even if it's just to place a telephone call to a lawyer (strip search on leaving and on returning, as well as kneading and metal detector).<sup>7</sup>

\* Sleep deprivation. Guards count the prisoners every 30

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<sup>4</sup>Letter of January 23, 1995.

<sup>5</sup>Rob Unruh, "'Super Max' will take in federal prisons' worst inmates," Chicago Daily Law Bulletin, December 1, 1994, p. 2.

<sup>6</sup>Cauchon, "The Alcatraz of the Rockies".

<sup>7</sup>López-Rivera letter of January 23, 1995.

minutes at night, clanging open the solid steel doors to each cell--"They are as loud as artillery rounds", reports Oscar López Rivera. During such counts, guards also knock on the windows, and shine a light on the prisoners' faces. A promised change to count every 60 minutes won't make a significant difference.

\* Contact, visual and audio isolation from fellow prisoners. "The term 'solitary confinement' isn't accurate," according to associate warden John Vanyur, who continued, "Yes, they spend most time alone in a cell."<sup>8</sup> "Hard-edged solitude," one observer called it, in "an ingeniously sealed archipelago".<sup>9</sup> "Cells are designed so inmates cannot make eye contact with other prisoners".<sup>10</sup> Even at Marion the prisoners were allowed to share a cup of coffee or a postage stamp with those who needed them. Not at ADX.<sup>11</sup>

\* Criteria for placement in/transfer out. The assertion that ADX is necessary to control the "worst of the worst", who have "earned" their way to the end of the line, are the same claims given short shrift by Congressional consultants investigating Marion, who found that 80% of the prisoners weren't even classified as needing its high level of security.<sup>12</sup> There is absolutely no due

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<sup>8</sup>Cauchon, "The Alcatraz of the Rockies".

<sup>9</sup>Clines, "A Futuristic Prison".

<sup>10</sup>Unruh, "'Super Max'"; Clines, "A Futuristic Prison".

<sup>11</sup>López-River letter of January 23, 1995.

<sup>12</sup>Breed and Ward Report in Oversight Hearing, U.S. House of Representatives Subcommittee on Courts, Civil Liberties and the Administration of Justice, 99th Congress, 1st Session, June 16, 1985, Serial No. 26, pp. 33, 35, 39. The same claims were also more recently rejected by the federal court which condemned

process involved. Officials can select whoever they wish for placement at ADX, and once there, the odyssey has no finite term. In spite of officials' claims that "[w]hat puts a man in is his behavior, and what gets a man out is his behavior,"<sup>13</sup> the criteria for placement are vague.<sup>14</sup> Although there is no work and nothing to do, "[t]hey can work their way out of this prison over three years," according to an associate warden.<sup>15</sup> That is what officials said about Marion, but the average stay there was more than three years,<sup>16</sup> as advances through the "program" were set back by a variety of causes, from "insolence" to refusing to renounce one's

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California's notorious Pelican Bay Security Housing Unit [SHU], another home for the "worst of the worst" [Madrid v. Gomez, No. C90-3094 TEH (N.D. Cal.), Opinion of January 10, 1995, p. 3] and an example of the dangerous "Marionization" trend in U.S. prisons noted by Human Rights Watch. [Prison Conditions in the United States: A Human Rights Watch Report (New York: 1991), p. 3] "Defendants [California Department of Corrections] have presented the Pelican Bay SHU as a centerpiece of their program to decrease violence in the California prison system. [...] Statistics submitted by the defendants show a consistent rate of decline in violence since 1984, five years before Pelican Bay opened its doors in December of 1989. Madrid v. Gomez, p. 289 n. 204. The California Department of Corrections includes in its training that "isolation of semi-sensory deprivation" and "dehumanizing incarceration" are factors which increase violence by prisoners. Madrid v. Gomez, p. 290 n. 206.

<sup>13</sup>Clines, "A Futuristic Prison".

<sup>14</sup>Tom Manning, for example, was sent to Marion directly from court, not because he demonstrated any lack of ability to comply with prison rules--he'd never been given the opportunity--, but because he was charged with being part of a clandestine group opposed to the foreign and domestic policies of the U.S. government. In spite of ten years in prison without a single act that threatened prison security, he is now at ADX.

<sup>15</sup>Cauchon, "The Alcatraz of the Rockies".

<sup>16</sup>Raymond Holt and Richard Phillips, "Marion: Separating fact from fiction," Federal Prisons Journal, Spring 1991, p. 34.

political beliefs.

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Florence's ADX clearly ups the ante, not just from Alcatraz, but from Marion, its immediate predecessor. Marion, condemned as a human rights nightmare by virtually every human rights group which evaluated its conditions of isolation and behavior modification; Marion, the model for the control unit prisons which populate more than 35 state prison systems; Marion, itself denounced by Amnesty International and its progeny at McAlester, Oklahoma, as well denounced by Amnesty International.<sup>17</sup>

Since Alcatraz closed in 1963, the Bureau has had three decades worth of experience in honing its control unit policy. Officials can lay no claim to innocence: the trail is well documented by Amnesty International and other human rights groups.<sup>18</sup>

1985: U.S. Congress: "Negative health consequences" may flow from lockdown confinement; staff operate under "combat mentality";

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<sup>17</sup>Amnesty International, United States of America: Conditions for death row prisoners in H-Unit, Oklahoma State Penitentiary, May 1994; Professor Roy King, Amnesty International: Conditions for Death Row Prisoners in H-Unit, Oklahoma State Penitentiary, USA, May 1994, p. 5 ("The 'philosophy and design' were said to be 'modelled on the Federal penitentiary at Marion Illinois.'"); p. 6 ("When McAlester staff speak of Marion as the main inspiration for the development of H-Unit the presumption has to be that they have attempted to carry through the logic of the Marion lock down and close confinement into a philosophy of non-contact.").

<sup>18</sup>Even the biased federal court which found the conditions at Marion to be constitutional noted the conditions to be "sordid and horrible", "ghastly", and "depressing in the extreme". Bruscino v. Carlson, 854 F.2d 162, 164, 166 (7th Cir. 1987).

the lockdown should not be permitted to endure indefinitely.<sup>19</sup>;

1985: American Friends Service Committee: Marion represents "a course that favors the continual escalation of repression as a means of control, even though it has never been demonstrated that repression brings its desired results."<sup>20</sup>;

1987: John Howard Association: Marion "is not a normal maximum security prison on lockdown status, but rather a firmly established, fully functioning behavior modification program..." "The Marion program seems to be designed to break the defiant spirit and behavior...through a year of more of sensory and psychological deprivation [in which] prisoners are stripped of their individual identities..."<sup>21</sup>;

1987: Amnesty International: "Within Marion, violations of the [United Nations] Standard Minimum Rules [for the Treatment of Prisoners] is common... There is hardly a rule in the Standard Minimum Rules that is not infringed in some way or other."<sup>22</sup>;

1990: National Interreligious Task Force on Criminal Justice: "The absence of balance in the procedures at Marion prison, where

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<sup>19</sup>Oversight Hearing, U.S. House of Representatives Subcommittee on Courts, Civil Liberties and the Administration of Justice, 99th Congress, 1st Session, June 16, Serial No. 26, pp. 33, 35, 39.

<sup>20</sup>Mauer and Motz, American Friends Service Committee, The Lessons of Marion--The Failure of a Maximum Security Prison: A History and Analysis, with Voices of Prisoners, (Philadelphia, PA), p. 2.

<sup>21</sup>Report on the United States Penitentiary at Marion (Chicago, IL), p. 1.

<sup>22</sup>Allegations of Ill-Treatment in Marion Prison, Illinois, U.S.A. (London), p. 15.



security measures override the individual need for human contact, spiritual fulfillment, and fellowship, becomes an excuse for the constant show of sheer force. The conditions of Marion prison...constitute, in our estimation, psychological pain and agony tantamount to torture."<sup>23</sup>;

1990: U.S. Congress: Representatives expressed "concern...about the amount of time inmates spend in their cells in relative isolation and the limited opportunity for productive and recreational activity that is available in the highly controlled environment" and the need to "continue to develop a more humane approach to the incarceration of the maximum security prison population," particularly in light of Marion's function as a model for prisons in the U.S. and in other countries.<sup>24</sup>

In addition to these findings about Marion's specific conditions, the Bureau is well aware of testimony as well as published findings that long term solitary confinement and lack of sensory stimulation causes physical and psychopathological effects.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup>L.C. Dorsey, Marion Prison: Progressive Correction or Legalized Torture? (New York) p. 6.

<sup>24</sup>U.S. Congress:House of Representatives Subcommittee on Courts, Intellectual Property and the Administration of Justice, Report on Visit to the Marion Federal Penitentiary (Washington, D.C.) pp. 5, 6.

<sup>25</sup>See, e.g., Stuart Grassian, "Psychopathological Effects of Solitary Confinement," 140 American Journal of Psychiatry 1450 (1983); Grassian and Friedman, "Effects of Sensory Deprivation in Psychiatric Seclusion and Solitary Confinement," 8 International Journal of Law and Psychiatry 49 (1986). In litigation against the highest BOP officials challenging another control unit (this one at its prison at Lexington, KY), experts in the field of corrections,

The conclusion? The conditions at ADX are intentionally destructive of the human being and the human spirit, and human rights be damned.

"[T]he knowledge of torture is itself a political act, just as silence or ignorance of it have political consequence. To speak of the unspeakable is the beginning of action....There is not merely saying, there is doing."<sup>26</sup>

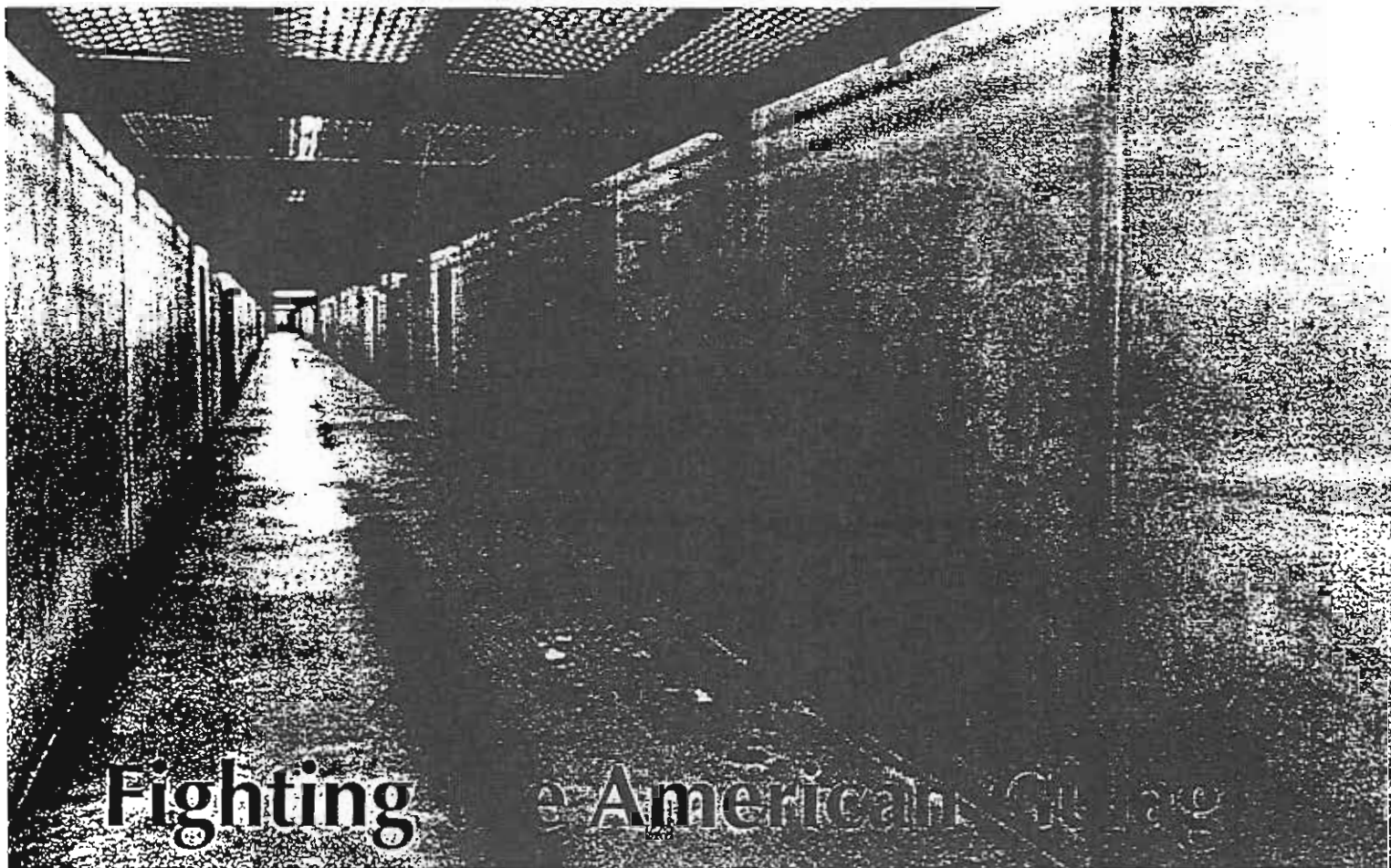
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including a psychiatrist and a psychologist testified to the physical and psychological deterioration caused by conditions like those at Marion and ADX. Baraldini v. Meese, 691 F.Supp. 435 (D.C. D.C. 1988); rev'd Baraldini v. Thornburgh, 884 F.2d 615 (D.C. Cir. 1989). A 1988 report by Amnesty International, The High Security Unit, Lexington Federal Prison, KY, written after the prisoners had been held for approximately two years, found:

The conditions and regime are deliberately and gratuitously oppressive. The constant and unjustified use of security chains, the repeated strip searching, the almost total lack of privacy, the claustrophobic lack of sensory stimuli, freedom of movement, possessions, choice of activities and incestuously small range of contacts cannot be other than debilitating...There is no need for these prisoners to be at HSU...There is overwhelming evidence that the prisoners at HSU have deteriorated physically and psychologically during their custody there. There has to be a prospect that one or more will finally resort to suicide should their custody at HSU be prolonged. I conclude therefore that HSU should close forthwith.

(at 15).

<sup>26</sup>Kate Millett, The Politics of Cruelty: An Essay on the Literature of Political Imprisonment, (New York: W.W. Norton, 1994), pp. 296-297.



# Fighting the American Gulag

by Corey Weinstein, M.D.

*A confused, mentally ill black prison inmate gets into a few fights, which results in his transfer to a high-security prison. There, in solitary confinement, his mental condition deteriorates into constant raving. No psychiatric care is provided. He finally covers himself with his own excrement. His treatment from the guards is a hot "nigger bath" that causes disfiguring third-degree burns over 40 percent of his body.*

*Prison staff harass and taunt an inmate known as the "jailhouse lawyer," until finally in frustration he throws cold coffee at a guard. He is firehosed while being pulled out of his isolation cell, and years of legal work for the many prisoners he assists is destroyed.*

*A particularly violent and racist white prisoner housed in a supermax unit is chosen by guards to be a "torpedo." Guards release him from his cell to attack a Latino prisoner the guards dislike.*

*Elsewhere, homeboys from the barrio are rounded up from all over the state prison system and sent to the supermax for the "crime" of being brown and associating with their friends.*

**B**eyond maximum-security lies the chilling world of "supermax" incarceration. As these new gulags explode in number, so grows the vast population of prisoners of color warehoused within their bleak, solitary walls.

Accompanying the explosion of prison construction in the U.S. over the past 25 years has been a dramatic increase in building high-security "prisons within prisons," known as supermaximum, security housing units (SHU), or "control units." It is estimat-

ed that more than 35 states now have such units, which normally house about 2 percent of a state's total prison population.

Isolated from ordinary prison facilities, control units are designed to do just what their name implies: physically control each convict with minimal guard contact. For out-of-cell movement, guards cuff prisoners' hands behind their backs and then fully shackle them in waist chains and leg irons. Twenty-three hours a day, prisoners are kept in solitary confinement in their 8-by-10-foot cells. They have little opportunity for work, education or social interaction, and they are forbidden from congregating with other inmates. Not surprisingly, the population of control units — mostly people of color — reflects the racially discriminatory nature of the criminal justice system in general and prisons in particular.

### CRUEL AND UNUSUAL

Prisoners often wind up in a control unit as punishment for an infraction at another prison, and punishment is exactly what they get. Goon-squad, backroom beatings; hogtying in chains; verbal harassment; racist taunting; food and mail tampering; denial of medical and psychiatric care; and interference with legal efforts — all these tactics are common in control units. But such everyday conditions of confinement also happen to violate all international standards for the treatment of prisoners and the U.S. Constitution's prohibition against cruel and unusual punishment.

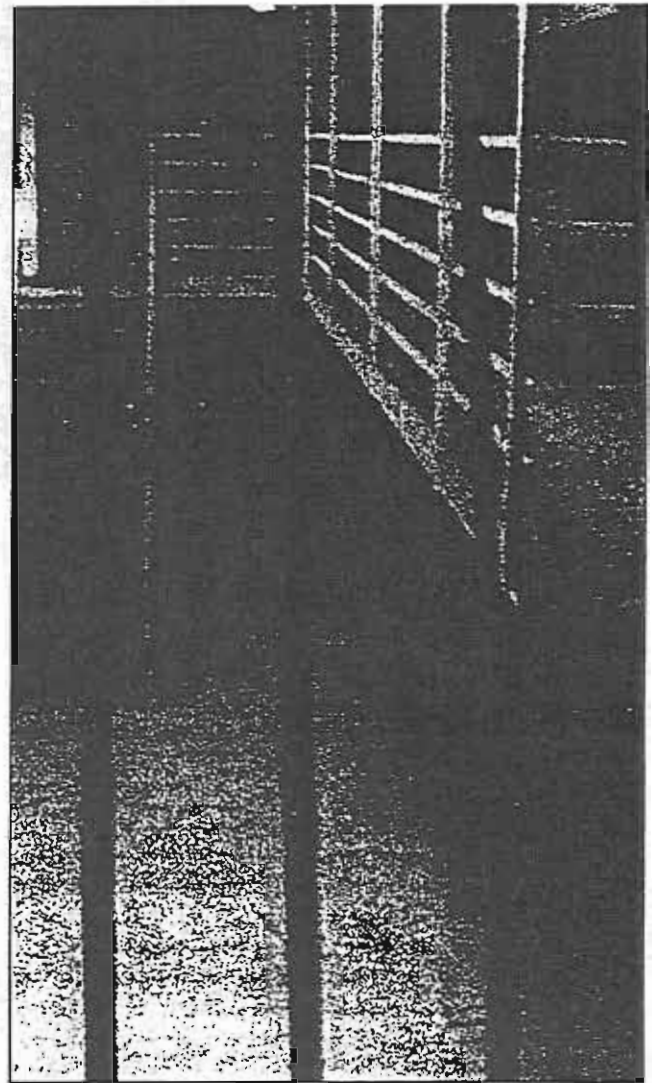
The Federal Bureau of Prisons (FBOP) has had a "supermax" prison for many years; Alcatraz was the best known. When Alcatraz closed, the bureau refitted a federal facility in Marion, Illinois, to serve as a control unit. During the 1970s various states built small solitary confinement units called Adjustment Centers (AC). While originally planned as treatment facilities for difficult-to-manage prisoners, the ACs soon became holding pens for Black Muslims and others who organized convicts. It was in the San Quentin AC in 1971 that black revolutionary George Jackson suffered a martyr's death during a brief takeover of that "prison within a prison."

Now, the FBOP is opening a new control unit in Florence, Colorado, while other high-tech, electronically controlled and monitored units open state by state: Pelican Bay, California; Westville, Indiana; Canon City, Colorado; Florence, Arizona; Potosi, Missouri; Trenton, New Jersey; Southport, New York; Shelton, Washington; Starke, Florida; and so on.

To counter the supermax construction boom, citizens' groups are forming, motivated by stories of prisoners' resistance and routine abuses. The Committee to End the Marion Lockdown (C MEL) began more than a decade ago in response to the systematic beating and chaining of all prisoners in the Marion FBOP unit following the murder of a guard. In 1991 the Prisoners Rights Union of California responded to a flood of prisoner complaints and jail-house legal action by forming the Pelican Bay Information Project (PBIP) to oppose California's control unit, the Pelican Bay Security Housing Unit.

Hunger-striking prisoners in the Westville, Indiana, Maximum Control Complex located a small group of radicals, the Committee for Freedom, to help draw attention to their protest. Human rights activists in Boulder, Colorado, accepted the double responsibility of organizing against the new federal unit in Florence and their state control unit in Canon City. They call their group the Colorado Committee Against Control Unit Torture (ACUT).

Human Rights Watch, an international watchdog organi- ➔



*Above: A Pelican Bay SHU cellblock*

*Left: A corridor at Pelican that inmates call the "torture hallway" because of the abuses that occur between its walls.*

*Photos courtesy Pelican Bay Information Project*

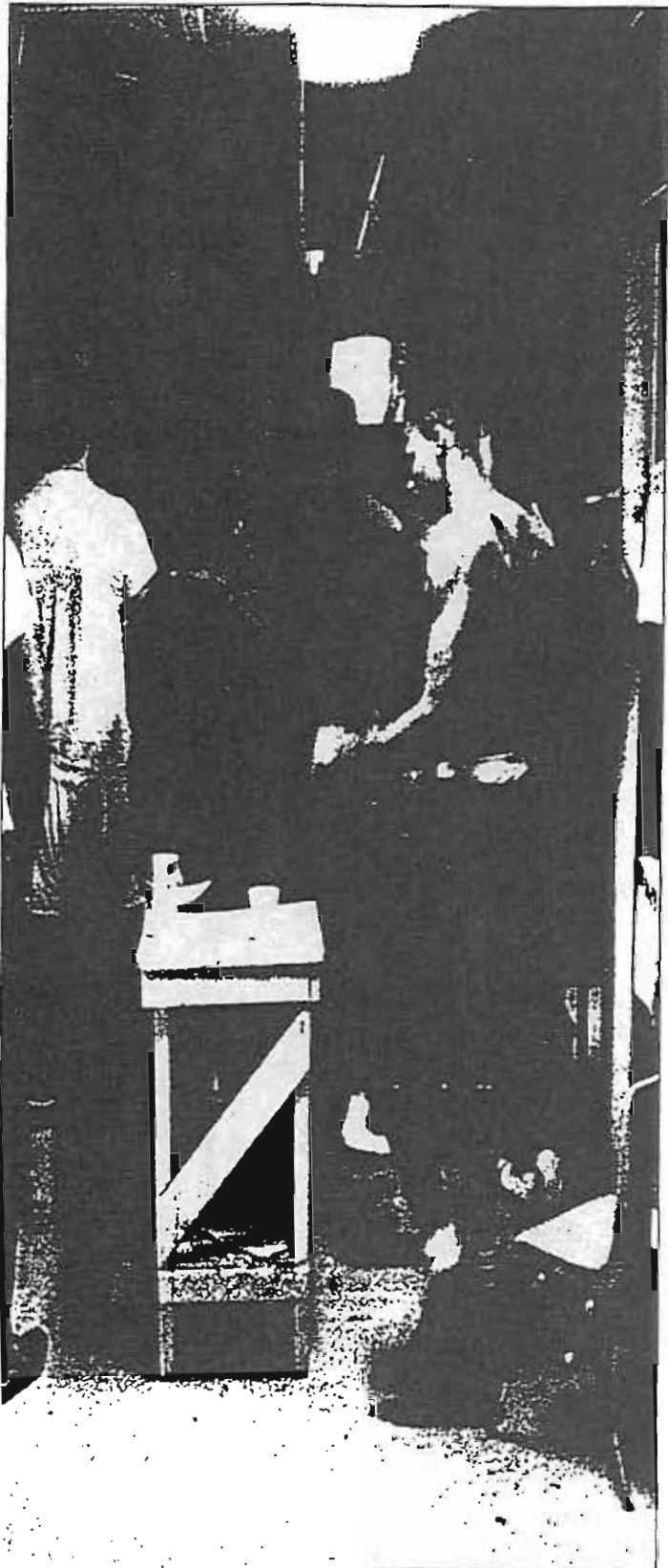


Photo: Mark Ludak, Impact Visuals

zation, has investigated and authored reports denouncing the use of control units in the U.S. The group has also helped form a national monitoring project by conducting the first state-by-state survey of control units and providing other technical assistance. The American Friends Service Committee has supported prisoners in the New Jersey unit at Trenton, and the organization is aiding the national monitoring effort, as well.

### TORTURING TROUBLEMAKERS

All the prison activist groups are small, funded by individual contributions and run solely by volunteers. Without paid staff and organizational support they have done remarkable work, organizing protests and getting the word out while supporting individual prisoners. No group has a legal staff, but all have helped organize or support various legal challenges to the use of torture in the control units.

The legal route, however, has not been particularly fruitful. An important federal court ruling came in a suit against the federal facility in Marion, Illinois. In that decision, the judge basically said that even though prisoners were housed and routinely punished in violation of the Constitution, it didn't matter, because prisoners were in Marion because they allegedly had been difficult-to-manage rule-breakers in other facilities. Where there have been favorable court actions, on the other hand, they have achieved only modest gains, such as eliminating the use of neck chains and tear gas, but not the use of full shackles or pepper gas.

The overall message from the courts: The state can legally torture prisoners who are labeled trouble-makers. It is important to note, however, that lots of things can constitute "trouble" for a prison. Certainly prisoners go to control units for assaulting prisoners or staff, mail fraud, sexual predation, extortion or other infractions. But many are sent there because of political leadership among convicts, jailhouse legal work, mental illness or simply to satisfy staff members' need to prove their power.

Community and media outreach has been the bread and butter of activist organizations as they build a base of support for change. Groups have organized many marches and demonstrations, as well as long-distance car caravans to bring protesters to the prisons. ACUT in Colorado and CEML in Illinois brought hundreds of protesters to the gates of the Colorado, control unit in 1993. Activists mounted a similar successful action in 1988 against the unit in Lexington, Kentucky. PBIP held a weekly vigil at the federal courthouse in San Francisco during a civil rights trial filed by Pelican Bay inmates in the fall of 1993. A nationwide effort earlier that year resulted in demonstrations against control units in five cities. The groups' memberships often include people drawn in through these demonstrations and other public activities, as well as family and friends of people incarcerated in the SHUs.

Anti-control unit activists employ a range of strategies in their work with prisoners. All consider their correspondence with prisoners a central part of information gathering and prisoner support. Many publish prisoners' writing, art and poetry as a way to provide a positive vent for inmates' frustrations; at the same time, the creative expression helps the

community understand the human face of the "damned."

Close contact with prisoners, both those in the SHUs and those recently released, is critical for the work of the anti-control unit groups. PBIP, for example, credits much of its credibility and visibility to the leadership of Luis Talamantez, who was a prisoner in the San Quentin Adjustment Center with George Jackson two decades ago. "Ex-cons are our main source of information about what conditions are like inside," he explains.

## DEVELOPING STRATEGY

Most groups regularly visit their designated facility as social visitors. PBIP makes site visits led by an attorney, thereby making the prisoners clients of the organization for the purpose of recording their complaints. Such investigative visits often cause quite a stir in the community around the prison, as when PBIP petitioned the county grand jury to investigate the Pelican Bay State Prison.

For all their hard work, these small groups, with limited financial resources, have not been able to close down, significantly reform or stop the building of a single control unit. Getting "tough on crime" is always a popular political stance to take; even self-identified liberals vow to punish lawbreakers and promise to execute as many convicted felons as possible. Voices that speak up for prisoners are easily overwhelmed by the unified force of law-and-order politicians and victims groups, the constant barrage of crime stories in the media that misinform the public and feed the public's fear and paranoia, and the concentrated power of the guards' unions and other special interests that benefit from what has been called the "prison/industrial complex."

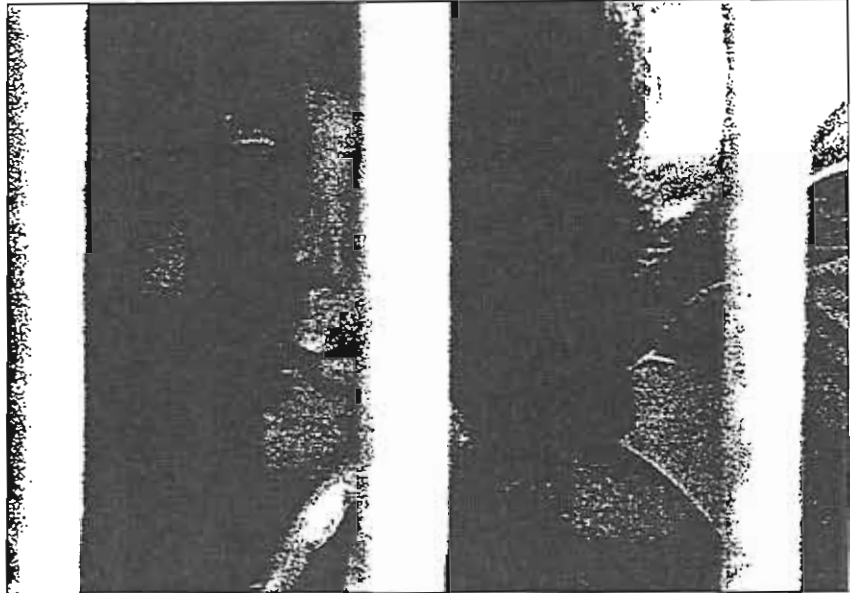
At this point, the anti-control unit organizations are developing a focused strategy to reach out to other groups in order to build broader support for their campaigns. They have identified four main areas of work:

§ Human Rights: The U.S. is a signatory to two U.N. treaties: the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the Conventions against Torture and Racism. The U.S. is therefore formally opposed to the very conditions common in control units. Human rights organizations need to be kept informed and encouraged to act on the failure of conscience and law that has accompanied bringing order to the prisons. Religious organizations could be willing allies because of their strong opposition to human rights abuses.

§ Racism: African Americans, Latinos and Native Americans are the main residents of control units. At Pelican Bay in California, 87 percent of inmates are people of color, and a stunning 60 percent are Latino. Trenton's unit in New Jersey is almost exclusively African American. Civil rights organizations based in communities of color have not been active

in supporting their incarcerated community members, and anti-control unit groups could play a role in informing and motivating greater involvement on the part of these and other anti-racist groups.

§ Violence: Despite all the attention paid to violence in the community and violence as a public health problem, the role of state-sponsored violence has been more or less ignored. Anti-control unit groups must get more involved in anti-violence work to bring this perspective to any honest attempt to reduce the level of violence in our communities.



(Ironically, on the streets, a control unit stay is a preferred credential for gang leadership.)

§ Left progressives can sympathize with the many inmates sentenced to control units for political organizing or jailhouse legal work while in prison. Recently the Prison Project of the National Lawyers Guild began a support program for jailhouse lawyers and has joined the anti-control unit movement. Other organizations of this kind need to be brought into the struggle.

In October 1994 the U.S. officially announced that more than 1 million citizens are locked up in federal and state prisons. At least 20,000 of these convicts are in control units and thousands more are locked down in segregated punishment cells in individual prisons. The Russians built the GULAG, an acronym referring to the administrative office that built and managed the Soviet prison system. The gulag in the U.S. might properly be called "BOP-DOC" for Bureau of Prisons and Department of Corrections. In the end, the fight to reform BOP-DOC will be equally as important to this country's struggle for justice and a humane society as the Russian victory over their gulag system was to the triumph over Soviet tyranny. **if**

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*A Latino prisoner in  
Leavenworth Federal  
Penitentiary.*

*Photo: Jeffrey Scott, Impact Visuals*