

1987

!!!!MARION-LEXINGTON UPDATE!!!!

During the past several months there have been many new developments concerning the lockdown at Marion Federal Prison in Illinois and the control unit at Lexington Prison in Kentucky. While some of the news has been disturbing (although not unexpected), there have also been some significant victories. Both the positive and negative developments underline the importance of increasing the work and commitment to end the brutal conditions at Marion and Lexington.

On February 25, Judge James L. Foreman issued his long-awaited decision in the suit brought to Federal Court by Marion inmates in an effort to end the lockdown. The judge refused to rule the conditions of the Marion lockdown unconstitutional. In his ruling the judge stated that the prisoners at Marion were not credible witnesses: their testimony was not to be believed. He also ruled that the men could be chained spreadeagled to their cement beds as long as they were checked "periodically" by guards.

The Bureau of Prisons is now free to maintain the lockdown indefinitely. Many of the prisoners faced harassment and abuse for bringing the suit against the B.O.P. and for coming forward to testify. Now they will decide whether to appeal this adverse ruling.

The government plans to keep the lockdown permanent. Marion prison officials no longer refer to the prison as "under lockdown". Instead, the lockdown is now described by Warden Gary Henman as normal procedure in a security-level 6 prison. Marion is the only prison in the US designated as security-level 6.

The Committee to End the Marion Lockdown held the Second Marion Conference was held November 2nd, 1986 on the third anniversary of the lockdown. A report on the conference was sent to every prisoner at Marion. The prison administration held the literature for two months before finally allowing delivery. Many prisoners wrote back expressing gratitude for the Committee's efforts and requesting more literature. However, when the Committee attempted to send additional literature inside, the prison administration returned it. They claimed it was disruptive to the orderly running of the prison. The Committee to End the Marion Lockdown has lodged a protest with the Marion administration. In the meantime, personal letters are being sent to those prisoners who have responded.

When the Lexington Control Unit for women was opened in October of 1986, it housed 2 women: Alejandrina Torres, a Puerto Rican P.O.W., and Susan Rosenberg, a North American anti-imperialist. Since then, the government has placed two more women in the Control Unit. Sylvia Baraldini is, like Susan, a North American anti-imperialist sent to Lexington because of her political views. Debra Brown is a Black woman, sentenced to death for her part in a multi-state murder spree with her husband Alton Coleman. We believe that the government placed her in Lexington to combat charges that the Control Unit is being used against political prisoners, and to support their claim that prisoners in the Control Unit are "predatory and dangerous". Carol Manning, another North American anti-imperialist, has been designated for Lexington.

At the beginning of the year, the Lexington prison administration capitulated on its restrictions of the prisoners' correspondence list. This was a result of a letter campaign by the prisoners' supporters, and by Alejandrina's and Susan's refusal to submit a correspondence list limited to fifteen names.

Organizing by the newly-formed Committee to Shut the Lexington Control Unit has attracted interest in the Control Unit by some Lexington-area women's groups and the Lexington media. This public scrutiny, punctuated by a demonstration of 250 people at the Control Unit on March 8th, International Women's Day, forced the Lexington administration to repaint the bright white inside of the Control Unit to tan. This was a significant victory because of the disorienting quality of the color white and its harmful long-term mental and physical effects on the women.

This back-pedaling by the Bureau of Prisons administration is proof that the government isn't all-powerful. Most of the credit for the victories won belongs to the women incarcerated in the Control Unit. Their example of resistance to the deplorable conditions they face is what the government fears most and is the main reason the US tried to isolate these women in the first place.

But these victories don't go far enough and they are reversible. The government will attempt to take them back whenever it feels it can get away with it. As is the case with Marion Prison, the Lexington administration has begun to restrict the type of literature the prisoners in the Control Unit can receive. We will not stop until the Control Unit is shut down completely!