

Committee to End the Marion Lockdown
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June, 1996

Dear Friends,

Enclosed is a summary of the recently completed spring activities and some newspaper clippings that appeared in response to our May 4 demonstrations.

Thank you so much for your help with all these efforts.

Sincerely,

CEML

Spring Activities of the Midwest Region of the National Campaign to Stop Control Unit Prisons

Background

In December of 1994 more than 50 anti-control unit activists traveled to Philadelphia from across the United States, determined to coordinate activities that were taking place throughout the country to oppose control unit prisons. The result of that two-day meeting was the National Campaign to Stop Control Unit Prisons. After almost a year of informal discussions, a second national meeting was held in Chicago in October of 1995. There we settled on an seven-month plan that would culminate in coordinated regional activities in opposition to control unit prisons in the Spring of 1996.

After this vision was established, those of us in the mid-west region began to plan for the spring. For those organizations which had been involved in this type of work for a long time, such as the National Committee to Free Puerto Rican Prisoners of War and Political Prisoners (National Committee) and the Committee to End the Marion Lockdown (CEML), the main question was how to expand the work and involve other sympathetic and interested people and organizations. We talked with with many people, and eventually the coalition that would represent the midwest region was formed. Organizations that were represented included the Crossroad Support Network, the Illinois Coalition Against the Death Penalty, Chicago Legal Aid to Incarcerated Mothers, Prisoners of Conscience Project, the Prison Action Coalition, Prairie Fire Organizing Committee, the Aaron Patterson Defense Committee, 8th Day Center for Justice, the Autonomous Zone, and several other individuals, in addition to the National Committee and CEML. Plans were made to hold an educational program on Saturday, April 20 and a demonstration on Saturday, May 4.

In preparation for the activities, the midwest region collected descriptions of planned activities from the various regions throughout the country and published them in *Abolish!*, the newsletter of the National Campaign. The purpose of *Abolish!* was to allow the the different regions to organize around their individual plans while placing these plans into a national, coordinated context.

April 20 Program

The program for April 20 was an all-day affair. The morning consisted of five simultaneous workshops: Women in Prison, Control Unit Prisons, Prison Industry, Political Prisoners, and the Death Penalty. Although we expected only a few people to attend the morning workshops, over 100 came and distributed themselves rather evenly among the five groups. After lunch, another 60 people joined us as we heard the keynote speaker, Marc Mauer, Assistant Director of the Sentencing Project. Marc, who has authored many studies about the insanity of the imprisonment binge and the racist

implications of this process, spoke eloquently on these topics and other related ones.

After Marc's talk, a panel of "eminent people" were introduced with the notion that they would hear testimony from people who had been involved with the criminal justice system, and then would make a brief statement about what they thought of the system. The panel included several prominent members of the Chicago activist community, including two assistant principals in the Chicago public school system (from Englewood Academy, one of the largest Black high schools in the city, and from Roberto Clemente High School, the largest Puerto Rican high school), the Democratic nominee (and a certain winner) for one of Chicago's congressional seats, a state representative, a prominent physician, a labor activist, and a journalist from one of Chicago's two major newspapers.

This panel then heard testimony from 19 witnesses, including political prisoners who wrote, video-taped, or audio-taped messages; an ex-death row prisoner who was found innocent and released, the mother of a framed prisoner on death row, a prisoner who had done 15 years in Indiana prisons, several community activists, three women who had been incarcerated and spoke of how they were brutalized in prison, a physician who runs the biggest women and children's AIDS program in the city, and many others. When the three hours of testimony were complete, the panelists came forward and eloquently lent their support to the testimony that had been put forward. Several people noted that at the end of the long day, they felt like they had been put through an emotional wringer but that, at the same time, they had learned a great deal and felt encouraged to act.

May 4 Activities

On May 4 about 80 people from Chicago met at the Puerto Rican Cultural Center at 6 am and boarded two buses. We then traveled for about four hours to the Wabash Valley Secured Housing Unit in Carlisle -- Indiana's second control unit prison, and site of terrible brutality. A severe rain storm was sweeping the area at the very moment we stepped off the buses to demonstrate. Undeterred, and partly protected from the storm by plastic trash bags that we had brought along for just such an occasion, we picketed on the road right in front of the prison, just under the gun towers, for about an hour, followed by two speeches. One was by S.A. Tinnin-Bey, who had done 15 years in three different Indiana prisons. He related the story of his participation in a march in the yard of Pendelton Penitentiary, conducted in solidarity with hunger-striking prisoners in Indiana's first control unit prison (the Westville Maximum Control Complex). The marchers there were in turn repressed by a long prison-wide lockdown. The other talk was by Charles Carney of 8th Day Center for Justice. Charles was one of the organizers of the day and had been visiting several prisoners in the Wabash torture unit.

We then left Wabash and moved onto the next site, the United States Penitentiary at

Terre Haute. USP Terre Haute currently cages Puerto Rican POW Eddie Cortes and is the site of the federal death row. Along the way, we stopped at a food plaza and met, by design, three more cars that had come from Chicago, a car from Indiana, one from St. Louis, and a van with six students from Antioch College in Ohio. With our numbers now well over 100, we caravanned to Terre Haute. By now the sun had come out and we were energized by the drying out process -- as our shoes stopped squeaking and our clothes became lighter. After picketing for about an hour across the road from the prison grounds (extended negotiations with the state troopers, local police, and prisoncrats did not get us any closer than the half-mile distance to the prison), we heard from several speakers.

We started with a message from Owusu Yaki Yakubu, a prisoner leader for more than 25 years, urging us to do organizing that responds to community needs as the best way to organize to oppose the various brutalities of the "criminal" "justice" system. This was followed by a talk by Mike Stanek, a member of CEML who had done six months at the work camp at Terre Haute for an anti-nuclear weapons action, a message from Eddie Cortes read by his sister, Magdalena Cortes, and finally an inspirational rap by Puerto Rican national hero, Rafael Cancel Miranda. Rafael traveled from Puerto Rico to Chicago to help build for the actions and to attend them. Although he did 25 years in U.S. prisons, including six at Alcatraz and eight at Marion, and although he is 66 years old, Rafael has not slowed down by one second. His energy was contagious and his courage spiriting as he read the names, one at a time, of the 15 Puerto Rican POWs and PPs, and of several others, and lead us in chanting and calling for their release.

Now it was time for the last stop of the day. We traveled just a few miles to downtown Terre Haute and stopped at the courthouse, which faces Route 41, the main highway that goes through the city. There we picketed again and were joined by a group from the Sisters of Providence community in Terre Haute. Sr. Carol Nolan spoke first, on what prisons do to those of us on the outside, passionately noting the need for us to stop the cruelty of the prison system and the death penalty. S.A. Tinnin-Bey spoke next about his experiences inside Indiana prisons and his resolve to continue to speak out. He was followed by Mary L. Johnson, one of Chicago's most prominent activists, who made an eloquent presentation laced with humor and humanitarianism while at the same time explaining the destructive and dehumanizing nature of our racist society. This was followed by a greeting from Rosa Kurshan-Emmer on behalf of the Antioch students. Rosa ended her rap with "Que Viva Puerto Rico Libre!" much to the great pleasure of the demonstrators. This last demonstration was capped with an inspiring talk by Jose Lopez, the director of the Puerto Rican Cultural Center and a leading *independentista*. Jose discussed the issue of prisons in the context of colonialism and pledged that wherever they put the POWs, we would follow and would not stop until they were all free. Noting that together we had shut down Davis Hall, the control unit for women at Alderson prison, and then the control unit for women at Lexington prison, Jose made it clear that our resolve would match that of the state's.

Although all of us were exhausted, and some were still soggy from the earlier drenching, there was the spirit of a day well-spent as we headed back to our respective destinations -- some to other places in Indiana, to St. Louis, the Antioch students to Ohio, and most of us to Chicago, where we arrived at about 10:00 pm to cap our 16-hour, three-demonstration day.

Conclusion

It is always hard to know what to make of such a set of activities. Both the program and the demonstration were well-attended. Many of the people who attended were new to us and were obviously drawn to these events for important political reasons. Additionally, the coalition functioned very well, better than anything any of us could recall. In all of those long meetings and complicated interactions, and with two events only two weeks apart, there were arguments and political disagreements but this process only brought us closer. Finally, the media coverage was quite good with several television and radio spots throughout Indiana and four major newspaper articles. A prisoner at USP Terre Haute wrote to tell us that he had overheard that day some of the prisoncrats lamenting the exposure that we brought to the incarceration of Eddie Cortes and the federal death row.

On the other hand, many questions were raised by these events. Those of us who have been doing this work for a while could probably recall the names of 100 people who have expressed concern over the issues of prisons and racism but who did not attend either the program or the demonstration. In addition, the activities seemed to generate few people who will actually join the work in an ongoing way.

We are all certain that this is the work to be doing now. Prisons and white supremacy are one of the junctures at which the future of this country and perhaps even the world will be decided. How to do this work effectively in the time of reaction that is today remains the open question.

For further information, contact:

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Photos By MICHELLE STALEY

More than 125 protesters from the Chicago area stood outside in the rain Saturday speaking out against conditions in "Super Max" prisons like the one in Carlisle, the death penalty and the incarceration of political prisoners. The protesters call for spending more money on education to eliminate the need for such prisons.

Sullivan Daily News May 6, 1996

Protesters say prison money would be better spent on education programs

By MICHELLE STALEY
Times Staff Writer

Protesters called for investment instead of incarceration during a peaceful protest outside the Wabash Valley Correctional Institution Saturday.

"Dollars for education not for incarceration" was written on several placards carried by protesters outside the prison.

"We believe the way to prevent crime is to invest in our children," said Charles King, a Chicago math teacher.

Knee deep in muddy puddles of water, more than 125 protesters marched in front of WVCI shouting "shut it down."

"Rain, snow or sunshine we're here,"

said Alejandro Molina. "The idea is that somebody has to say this is wrong."

Eight Chicago organizations traveled five hours to protest in front of WVCI, the Federal Penitentiary, Terre Haute, and the Vigo County Courthouse. The protest was designed to raise awareness about super-max prisons, the death penalty and the incarceration of political prisoners.

With a handful of Indiana State Police vehicles standing by, the group assembled peacefully outside the prison fences on the grass near the WVCI tower.

"We feel like having over a million people incarcerated in this country is a travesty," said protester Charles Carney. "We can no longer incarcerate our way out of fun-

damental social problems. We want to see money put in the front end of the problem — Head Start, drug programs, education and gang prevention programs. It seems like politicians are cutting those programs and funding billions of dollars for building prisons — that's really the wrong approach."

King said he also believes funding should be used to build more schools, provide job training and drug rehabilitation programs for youth.

The FBI released preliminary figures Sunday reporting crime overall fell 2 percent last year from 1994, led by a 4 percent drop in violent crime. Although crime rates are falling, the FBI reported an increase in

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Prison protest

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juvenile crime.

The U.S. spends \$75 billion a year on the criminal justice system. \$25 billion of that funds prisons, King said.

About 50 percent of the people in Indiana prisons are convicted of drug crimes, King said. Instead of spending money to build more prisons why don't we spend those dollars on drug rehabilitation programs, he asked.

"I'm white and I'm middle class, but I don't want to live in a society where we keep putting people in cages," King said. "I want to vote for education not for barbed-wire fences."

"It has been proven that these prisons don't prevent crime, they torture people," King said. "About 95 percent of prisoners are released. Are they going to be able to function in society?"

Saderia Means, a prison minister, said she works to try to rehabilitate prisoners. "I'm finding that prisons are big businesses," she said. "I find they are not interested in rehabilitating these people."

King said he can't understand why rural communities actually go through bidding wars to bring

prisons to their area. Although King understands the need for jobs, he said he doesn't see why a drug rehabilitation center couldn't be built to provide jobs and serve as a beneficial tool for society.

"\$50 million for an institution like this — the whole thing just doesn't make sense," King said. "All they are doing is burying these people in cages."

"There are clearly people who need to be restrained," King admitted. "I don't think people need to be coddled. They don't need television and air conditioning. Even then do you have to chain them to their bed and let them lie in their own feces?"

King said a survey of wardens across the country revealed that wardens believe only 10 to 20 percent of their prison populations should be incarcerated.

King said he can understand why Robert A. Smith, a WVCI inmate who has pleaded guilty to murdering another inmate and requested the death penalty, wants to die.

"We are against the death penalty in every situation," King said. "Imagine a place where conditions are so bad that a person would rather die."

100 protesters rally at prisons, call for improved conditions

Indianapolis Star

By Susan Crittenden
CORRESPONDENT

TERRE HAUTE, Ind. — More than 100 protesters rallied at three sites in western Indiana on Saturday to express their opposition to the death penalty and controlled-unit prisons.

Caravan participants demonstrated at the Wabash Valley Correctional Institution in Carlisle and the U.S. Penitentiary and the Vigo County Courthouse in Terre Haute. They also marched along highways with banners chanting phrases such as "The human rights problem in the world today is right here in the USA."

Speeches were given at each location.

The rally was sponsored by Chicago's 8th Day Center for Justice and 23 other organizations, including the Indianapolis Peace and Justice Center. Two busloads of protesters from Chicago were joined by other activists, including nine students from Antioch College in Yellow Springs, Ohio.

"Antioch encourages its students to participate in social is-

suess, and the school gave us money to come here," said student Nick Szuberla. "We are interested in prison rights. We have a books-for-prisoners program."

Protesters also came to demand freedom for Puerto Rican prisoners of war, said Jose Lopez of Chicago.

"Edwin Cortes, who is at the federal penitentiary here, is charged with seditious conspiracy. But he was not motivated by personal gain. All of these Puerto Rican prisoners are advocates of independence for Puerto Rico," said Lopez. Cortes' sister came from Chicago to speak.

Penitentiary spokesman Gene Finley said that Cortes, 41, was sentenced to 20 years in prison in 1985 "for knowingly, willfully and unlawfully opposing by force the authority of the U.S. government."

Sponsors of the rally came to this area because of the secured housing unit at Carlisle and the penitentiary in Terre Haute, which will be used for all federal executions, said Charles Carney, a protest organizer.

At the Carlisle prison, up to 288

prisoners are kept locked in isolation for 23 1/2 hours a day. Any Indiana prisoner who requires two or more years of disciplinary segregation will be sent to Carlisle for incarceration, according to Lee Hoeffling of the correctional facility.

Carney said the secured housing unit is not about rehabilitation. "Punishment trends are harsher and harsher, and that perpetuates crime," he said.

S.A. Tinnin-Bey, an Indianapolis resident, spent more than a dozen years in the Indiana Reformatory. During his imprisonment, he was confined to a segregation cell and said he never knew why. He eventually was released from isolation by the recommendation of an ad hoc committee, he said.

"I'm trying to put something back. I work with youth programs, churches and schools, and I travel," he said.

5-10-96

Prison worker rejects pastor's opinion

Dear editor: On Friday, April 19, Sinai Temple in Michigan City held a tribute service in remembrance of the Holocaust. The Rev. Charles Doyle from Beverly Shores was the guest speaker.

During Rev. Doyle's lecture, in regard to the Holocaust, he compared the German state of political affairs during the period when the Nazis took power, to the current state of affairs in the United States today. During this sermon, he mentioned that we, here in Indiana, have one of those secret installations. That he calls the Super Max Prison. This, he stated, is parallel to the concentration camps the Germans put up, unknown (supposedly) to the German people. Rev. Doyle stated that the Westville Super Max is just one of these units secretly going up across the country.

He also continued that the guards who work there wear military style fatigues and "jack boots," all the while paralleling these guards to the German S.S. Gestapo who ran the concentration camps.

He added that the prisoners in the Westville Max Complex have no windows to see the weather, no contact with any other prisoners, just every other day when they are shackled by a guard who takes them for a shower, light bulbs which burn 24 hours a day so they never know what time, day or season it is. Then adding insult to injury, he compared the warden of the Indiana State Prison to the German people who knew of the existence of these German camps.

Rev. Doyle stated the warden never goes to death row. So, when he pulls the

Anvil Chorus

Letters to the Editor

The address for letters is Anvil Chorus, The News-Dispatch, 121 W. Michigan Blvd., Michigan City, IN, 46360. We prefer letters of no more than 250 words, and letters may be edited for length, clarity and accuracy.

Please include home and work telephone numbers for verification. The writer's full name is published with each letter.

switch, he personally never knows that death row inmate. This is the same as the German people never acquainting themselves to the concentration camp victims.

To myself, as a Department of Correction employee, who is Jewish, the remarks made at Sinai Temple are only the opinions of Rev. Doyle. He can say or parallel anything he wants too. But, implying that D.O.C. employees are the same as jack-booted Nazi S.S. is appalling to me.

This hits home personally, and I demand an apology from him, who only thinks he knows what he's talking about.

*Edward Pokorny
Michigan City*

Editor's note: The Rev. Charles E. Doyle of Beverly Shores had this response:

The thesis of my talk was that in times of crisis we tend to look for scapegoats rather than real solutions to our social problems.

In our times the scapegoats seem to be immigrants, people on welfare and criminals. In our frustration and anger we tend to marginalize the scapegoats and in extreme cases, as with the Holocaust, the scapegoats are seen as less than human.

Porkorny does not deny the conditions I described as existing at the Maximum Control Complex, which is on the same grounds as Westville Correctional Center, but is a separate institution.

That it is a "secret installation" is apparent to me, since I hold the belief that the vast majority of the population is unaware that hundreds of their fellow citizens are sent to these control units for a minimum of three years of almost absolute isolation.

The industrial waste of control units are these same persons being dumped back into their communities either as dehumanized automatons, unable to function in or outside society or as time bombs of uncontrollable rage.

If any apologies are in order, then we owe an apology to the guards that we ask to preside over the destruction of other human beings and for their own dehumanization they suffer in the process.

My reference to the warden of the Indiana State Prison never visiting death row, fearing to know them as persons since he might have to pull the switch for the electric chair, was to the warden functioning in the early seventies.

Protesters hit prisons

Opposition voiced about treatment of inmates

By Rachel Wedding 5/5/96
Tribune-Star Terre Haute, IN

Shielded in the front tower of the Wabash Valley Correctional Institution, prison guards peered down through the rain with binoculars to watch the sign-toting crowd Saturday.

Passing cars splashed water on the two charter buses that stood waiting on the highway in front of the maximum security prison at Carlisle, while the more than 100 rain-drenched men, women and children voiced their opposition to the conditions they say inmates experience.

"Stop pretending you are trying to help these men," one former inmate shouted through a portable-PA system. "They are not dead yet so stop trying to bury them alive."

Eight Chicago-based organizations joined the demonstrations conducted Saturday at Carlisle, Terre Haute City Hall and the U.S. Penitentiary in Terre Haute. The trip was arranged by the collective religious community and 8th Day Center for Justice to bring awareness to control unit prisons, the death penalty, and the large number of young and minority inmates.

"I visited Carlisle a year ago and I don't believe, if I were incarcerated there, that I



Prison protest: More than 100 men, women and children, most of them from the Chicago area, braved thunderstorms Saturday to protest what they said are deplorable conditions at the federal penitentiary in Terre Haute and the state prison at Carlisle.

Tribune-Star/Red Deuster

Prison • Continued from Page A1

would come out a sane person," said Sister Kathleen Desautels, a Catholic nun.

"I'm outraged about these conditions that I don't think most people understand," she said. "It's like a controlled concentration camp."

Aside from the curious tower guards, the demonstrators drew no attention from prison officials at Carlisle.

But demonstrators met more than 20 armed guards at the U.S. Penitentiary's Indiana 63 entrance, who quietly observed the activities and, with their presence, moved the demonstration to the east side of the highway.

Gene Finley, acting executive assistant at the penitentiary, said

the guards were posted only to ensure visitors' safe passage on and off prison grounds. Finley said none of the group had voiced any specific complaints to prison officials prior to their arrival.

"We're here to see that business goes as usual and procedures are carried out as well as possible," Finley said.

None of the demonstrators addressed prison personnel during the 90-minute protest. But Jaime Delgado shook his head at the drivers of some passing cars who waved their middle fingers at demonstrators.

Delgado, a 43-year-old director of a Hispanic AIDS and substance abuse clinic in west Chicago, says the public doesn't realize how seriously the decisions of public

officials affect inmates.

He spent five years in the penitentiary after he was accused of conspiracy for his alleged involvement with the Puerto Rican Independent Movement. Delgado was charged with conspiring with others to purchase explosives that would be used to help federal inmates escape prison.

"I was not subjected to physically abusive conditions, but I should have been in a minimum security prison camp," he said. "They' traditionally put political activists in a high-risk environment knowing full well it will put them in danger. You're resented by those serving long terms."

"Our purpose here today is to make that kind of information public."