

Southern Illinoisan

200 protest Marion 'dungeon'

By Larry Davis
Of The Southern Illinoisan

Some 200 protesters chanted in the streets of Carbondale Saturday before taking their fight against the nation's most secure prison to a gate outside it and then on to the town square of the city that shares its name.

They called the U.S. Penitentiary at Marion "a high technology dungeon," "a crime against humanity," and "a cemetery."

Prison spokesman Randy Davis said he respected the free speech rights of the demonstrators, but disagreed with their

complaints.

The protesters want an end to the lock down that began in 1983 after two correctional officers were slain inside the facility.

They said they want "the selective mistreatment of political prisoners" ended and prison control units everywhere abolished.

They also want Marion prison officials to stop using Crab Orchard Lake as its source of water because of the contamination that has been found there.

The prison is "a living hell," they said, where inmates are confined to 6-by-8-foot

cells for 22½ hours a day and are sometimes chained spread-eagled to concrete slabs and subjected to rectal searches.

Speakers mixed their messages with music and poetry. They encouraged each other with cheers and applause, but they painted pictures darker than the morning storm clouds that threatened to pour rain on them.

"We're angry about the conditions that exist there," said Nancy Kurshan of the Chicago-based Committee to End the Marion Lockdown.

Hers was one of the groups that sponsored the daylong demonstration that

began at 9 a.m. on the campus of Southern Illinois University-Carbondale.

Most of the demonstrators had ridden on four buses that left Chicago at midnight Friday. Steve Whitman, another committee member, said seven cities and nine college campus throughout the Midwest were represented.

Representatives from the New African People's Organization drove up from Mississippi.

The National Committee to Free Puerto Rican Prisoners of War was another demonstration sponsor, and the group

See Marion, A2

Marion prison protested ...

Continued from Page One

was met in Carbondale by members of the Southern Illinois Marion Prison Task Force.

Speakers said they had chosen to march down a stretch of Illinois 13 toward the U.S. Post Office in Carbondale because it offered high visibility. Later, on Marion's Tower Square they pleaded with area residents not to sell their consciences for prison paychecks.

All-in-all, the demonstrators were loud, but orderly, even when marching before a gate at the prison that separated them from a handful of correctional officers.

A gray-haired woman in Reeboks marched alongside a young boy carrying a Puerto Rican flag and a woman pushing a tot in a stroller.

Their banners were blunt; their chants, barbed.

"Bureau of Prisons — FBI — U.S. Justice is a lie!" went one chant.

"Marion Prison, we say, 'No!' Racist terror has got to go!" went another.

Some speakers lambasted the government's policies in El Salvador and Nicaragua; another asked for support to help combat AIDS.

The common theme was human rights, which the marchers claim are completely denied to the Marion prison inmates.

Chokwe Lumumba of the New African People's Organization told the group outside the prison that their presence was "a light in the midst of darkness."

They stood, he said, before "an institution which shows why this so-

themselves," he said, "as we stand here around an institution surrounded by barbed wire, with men standing on the other side — men watching us being watched by other men who are watching them."

Kurshan said the prison administration has perpetuated "a mythic story" about the institution and the men confined there.

"They would have us believe that somehow the men at Marion are the most demented forms of humanity that exist," she said.

But prison spokesman Davis said

the bottom line at Marion always has been and remains safety.

"The reason we went to this high security operation was because we found a need for it after years and years of going through problems here and at many other penitentiaries..." he said.

And while prison officials continue to consider other water supplies, Davis noted that the water from Crab Orchard Lake is tested weekly and repeatedly is given a "clear bill of health" by the state Environmental Protection Agency.



Southern Illinoisan photo by JAN ABBOTT

Pickets protest Marion lockdown

Marchers supporting the Committee to End the Marion Lockdown are shown during Saturday's march from the Southern Illinois University-Carbondale campus to the U.S. Peniten-

tiary at Marion. Demonstrations were held at the campus, the Federal Building and the post office in Carbondale.