

FEE HIKES, BUDGET CUTS: PRISON EXPANSION AND "US"!

YOU CAN'T UNDERSTAND THE PRISON QUESTION WITHOUT
TAKING INTO CONSIDERATION THE MEXICAN LIBERATION STRUGGLE

Chicano Mexicano Prison Project (CMPP) 2/1/10

On January 21 and 22, 2010, Critical Resistance (CR), organized two events around the question of prisons and their relationship to the current educational cut backs. Organized under the theme of FEE HIKES, BUDGET CUTS: PRISON EXPANSION AND US, the events were part of a two-day program held at UC San Diego at Cross Cultural Center (Comunidad Room). The first day consisted of a presentation by Ruth Wilson Gilmore, author of *Golden Gulag*, a professor and activist from USC. The second day was centered on a "Round Table" discussion on the PIC and the current financial crisis facing public education.

Founded in 1998, by 1960s-70s activists such as Angela Davis, CR is a left-oriented, multinational organization whose objective is the abolishment of the Prison Industrial Complex (PIC). It has several chapters in different areas of the United States.

MORE THAN 50 PEOPLE ATTEND ROUND TABLE

Attendance at the Round Table was excellent as more than 50 people, African, Asian, Mexican-Raza, and Europeans (White)—students and faculty—were present. The Chicano Mexicano Prison Project (CMPP) was invited to participate in the Round Table by Dennis Childs, Professor of Ethnic/African American Studies at UCSD.

CMPP members who attended the event were Cathy Espitia, Monica Bernal, Alfredo Soria, and Ernesto Bustillos. Also joining the CMPP was Benjamin Prado, a leading member of Unión del Barrio. The CMPP set-up a table with Unión del Barrio and CMPP literature. Also, before the Round Table began, the CMPP had an opportunity to hold an informal "platica" (political chat) with five members of MEChA (Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlán). CMPP members provided the Mechistas a brief background on its work and they in turn briefly described how they saw the political situation on campus.

Representing the CMPP at the Round Table was Compa Ernesto. His comments were centered on the history and goals of the CMPP, and how we saw the question of the mass incarceration of Mexicans and the PIC. Ernesto specifically elaborated upon the reality that prisons were both political and economic pillars of capitalism and how this was tied directly to the massive cut backs in education.

PRISONS ARE POLITICAL WEAPONS OF COLONIALISM

Compa Ernesto raised several points:

- Youth, specially Mexican and African, are key targets of the police and this why we find more Raza are in prison rooms and than in the university classrooms.
- Prisons are political weapons of the capitalism-colonialism system and are used to control and lock-up anyone who struggles or has the "potential" to rebel against racism, poverty, and other forms of oppression.
- The PIC has become increasingly important to the capitalist-colonialist system, because economically, the prisoners have become a profitable "commodity". Literally hundreds of thousands, mostly white and upper class,

people are making money out of the prison industry.

- It is in the interest of students and social activists to struggle for prisoners' rights, as the odds are that they too will end up doing some prison time.
- As almost everyone is guilty of breaking some law, the only difference between most people in the outside and those inside prisons, is that those inside got caught.

While generally speaking the CMPP's presentation was well received, it was obvious that some felt uncomfortable or opposed the connecting of the prison question to colonialism. This is usually the case as most people have never heard a position which explains incarceration and Raza self-determination within the context of the struggle for justice within the borders of United States.

IMPORTANCE OF COMMUNITY IS RECOGNIZED

After the Round Table presentations, those in attendance broke into small circles of five to six, to reflect upon what was presented to them. After 30 minutes, each group summed-up how they understood or felt about the PIC and what should be done. Some of the recommendations from the discussion circles included:

- To advocate for and support of an activist scholarship that addresses prisons and other social issues.
- Everyone present must work to form alliances or collaborate with other progressive groups doing work around the prison question.
- The need for more outreach and unity with community groups.
- Expose the role that capitalism plays in the incarceration of people and the construction of prisons.

CMPP'S PARTICIPATION WAS PART OF ITS WORK TO RAISE AWARENESS TO REALITIES OF PRISON

The participation of the CMPP event was important as it enabled the project to bring awareness to the question of prison to the university community (students and faculty). It also gave the CMPP an opportunity break to the isolation imposed by those who opposed the ant-colonial line put forth by the CMPP; a line which places the colonized people in the vanguard of the struggle against the system of capitalism which is responsible for the oppression of most of the world's humanity.

If it important to note that if it were not for Dr. Childs, the CMPP would not have been present at the Round Table, and most likely, a perspective from the Mexican community on the question of prisons and cut backs in education would not have been heard. Our presence allowed those attending to: (a) hear about the Mexican-Raza liberation struggle and how it relates to prisons, and (b), that most prisoners in Aztlán (what some called, the Southwest U.S.) are Mexicans, and thus we are suffering the most from the prison industrial complex.

If the CMPP was not present at the Round Table, those present would have left without having heard a perspective fundamental to understanding the Capitalist-Colonial Prison Industrial Complex.

Venceremos!

Fee Hikes, Budget Cuts: Prison Expansion & Us

A roundtable discussion for scholars, students, activists, & workers hosted by Critical Resistance



Critical Resistance is a national grassroots organization working to abolish the prison industrial complex. We believe that basic necessities such as food, shelter, and freedom are what really makes our communities healthy and free.

For more info contact: Critical Resistance: 510.444.0484 www.criticalresistance.org

Friday January 22 • 12 - 2pm UC San Diego • Cross Cultural Center Comunidad Room

Please join us for a brown bag roundtable discussion to figure out what we can and need to do together:

- How can we not just survive education, health care, and social services budget cuts - but overturn them?
- Why is California working to build tens of thousands of prison beds?
- What are organizers doing to link the fight for education to the fight against the prison industrial complex - and what new links do we need to make?

NO MORE PRISONS
RE-INVEST IN OUR COMMUNITIES



Cathy Espitia and Benjamin Prado of Unión del Barrio



Ernesto Bustillos and Alfredo Soria



Round Table discussion. UCSD. Jan. 22, 2010



Professor D. Childs