

Prisons: Terror For The Poor –Profits For The Rich

SUPPORT THE CALIFORNIA PRISONER HUNGER STRIKE!

On July 1, 2011, hundreds of inmates in the Security Housing Unit (SHU) at Pelican Bay California State Prison, located near the Oregon border, went on a hunger strike to protest conditions in the isolation units known as the SHU. The strike immediately spread to 13 of the state's 33 prisons, such as Corcoran, Tehachapi, Centinela, and Calipatria. The strike, led by and organized by the prisoners themselves, is calling for an end to the horrific and dehumanizing conditions imposed on thousands of prisoners who find themselves in solitary confinement (SHU).

The prisoners have outlined five core demands:

1. Eliminate group punishments. When an individual prisoner breaks a rule, the prison often punishes a whole group of prisoners of the same race.
2. Abolish the debriefing policy and modify active/inactive gang status criteria. Prisoners are accused of being active or inactive participants of prison gangs using false or highly dubious evidence, and are then sent to long-term isolation (SHU). They can escape these tortuous conditions only if they “debrief” [snitch] –that is, provide information on gang activity.
3. Comply with the recommendations of the US Commission on Safety and Abuse in Prisons (2006) regarding an end to long-term solitary confinement. Some prisoners have been kept in isolation for more than thirty years.
4. Provide adequate food. Prisoners report unsanitary conditions and small quantities of food that do not conform to prison regulations.
5. Expand and provide constructive programs and privileges for indefinite SHU inmates. The hunger strikers are pressing for opportunities “to engage in self-help treatment, education, religious and other productive activities...” [See: Prisoner Hunger Strike Solidarity Blog]

SHU VIOLATES INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS STANDARDS

Prisoners and prisoner rights advocates have long complained that the SHU amounts to torture. They have pointed to the fact that the methods practiced in the SHUs, in most instances, stand in violation of international human rights standards found in the U.N. (United Nations) Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment and the U.N.'s Basic Principles for the Treatment of Prisoners. [*Basic Principles for the Treatment of Prisoners*. Adopted and proclaimed by U.N. General Assembly resolution 45/111 , on December 14, 1990]

The SHU cells are about the size of an apartment bathroom, have no windows, inmates spend 22 1/2 hours a day in their cells, and allowed only an hour a day for a walk or exercise in fenced cages which are nothing but “dog runs”. Inmates are not allowed contact with anyone and the cells are soundproofed, thus denied sensory stimulation.

PRISONERS ARE EXPOSED TO VIOLENCE AND DISEASE

In late June of this year (2011), a three-judge state court ordered the

reduction of the prison population as it violated the Constitution's ban on cruel and unusual punishment. It found that the over crowding led to the deprivation of medical and other essential services. According to the court ruling, the prison conditions expose inmates to a high level of violence and disease –often leading to mental illness. About two thirds of prisoner suicides take place while they are in solitary confinement.

PRISONS ARE HUMAN WAREHOUSES AND CONCENTRATION CAMPS

At Pelican Bay, up to 400 inmates, of all races, have been participating in the hunger strike and statewide up 1,000 prisoners, in some form, are involved in the strike. California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation officials themselves said that up 6,600 inmates joined the strike at its peak over the Fourth of July weekend — making it the largest prison hunger strike in California in more than ten years.

The Chicano Mexicano Prison Project (CMPP) is in complete support of the just demands of the prisoners. Founded in 1993, as a project of Unión del Barrio, the CMPP became aware that prisoners were planning a hunger strike during the dialogue took place at its annual Conference On Raza Prisoners and Colonialism (June 11, 2011, San Diego, Califaztlán).

The CMPP understands that prisons are nothing but human warehouses and concentration camps for oppressed nationalities (Mexicans-Raza, Africans, etc.) and poor and working class people (of all races).

The truth is that the U.S. prison system or “Prison Industrial Complex”, the largest in the world, has become a major producer of wealth –where a tiny group of capitalists make billions of dollars out of the misery of poor and working class people.

PRISONS ARE CAPITALIST-IMPERIALISTS INSTITUTIONS

Prisons are capitalism-imperialist/colonialist institutions used to keep the masses from struggle and from participation in the national liberation movements found within the current borders of the U.S. The CMPP recognizes that prisons and prison torture cannot be eliminated until we eliminate the capitalism. Therefore our struggle is not one just against prisons, but against the conditions in society which force many into crime and then profits from their incarceration.

Whether the just demands of the striking prisoners are met or not, the hunger strike demonstrates the high level of unity (among all races) and organizing capabilities of the masses when they are conscious and prepared to fight for what is just and right. In struggle, there are no defeats if those involved learn from their experiences.

Support The Prisoner Hunger Strike!
Todo Poder Al Pueblo! Venceremos!

[See CMPP at: <http://uniondelbarrio.org>]

