

# THE KITE

★ Working to Extend Democracy to All ★

★ Volume 1, Number 3 ★

★ September 2018 ★

## INSIDE THE PRISON LABOR STRIKE NEW TACTICS PAY OFF IN MAINSTREAM COVERAGE

By James Kilgore,  
*Truthout - September 4, 2018*

“Fundamentally, it’s a human rights issue. Prisoners understand they are being treated as animals. Prisons in America are a warzone. Every day prisoners are harmed due to conditions of confinement. For some of us it’s as if we are already dead, so what do we have to lose?”  
—Pre-strike statement from Jailhouse Lawyers Speak

When the 2016 US prison strike kicked off, the media barely whispered. Despite efforts by the Free Alabama Movement, an organization centered around the men inside Holman prison, to spread the message through social media and compelling video footage taken inside prisons, mainstream journalists weren’t biting. While independent media outlets covered the strike, an action that ultimately involved thousands of people in two dozen states drew virtual silence from mainstream media.

With the current ongoing prison strike, we find a totally different scenario. The New York Times, the Guardian, Al Jazeera and The Washington Post all ran sympa-

thetic op-eds at the strike’s outset. MSNBC’s Al Sharpton had a segment on the strike in which he interviewed a formerly incarcerated man (Darren Mack). USA Today ran an article on support demonstrations. Suddenly, prison militancy has become headline-worthy. As someone who spent six-and-a-half years behind bars, I have to wonder: What the hell is going on?

### Testament to Hard Work

Several factors are at play here. First, as prison historian Dan Berger observes, “it is a testament to the hard work that has been happening.” Due to the efforts of millions of activists, mass incarceration has grown into an issue of political importance. We have national campaigns to end cash bail, local efforts to close jails, networks formed to defend the rights of LGBTQ folks who are locked up, and massive resistance to immigration detention and deportation. Organizations of formerly incarcerated people like All of Us or None, JustLeadershipUSA and the National Council of Formerly Incarcerated Women and Girls continue to proliferate.

In parallel with the growth of this movement has been a swelling in the ranks of the Incarcerated Workers’ Organizing Committee. Closely linked to the revolutionary unionists of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), the Incarcerated Workers’ Organizing Committee has been the most vibrant source of support on the streets for both strikes. In its 2018 iteration, the Incarcerated Workers’ Organizing Committee also draws activists from a resurgent left, typified by the Democratic Socialists of America, now the largest socialist formation in the US in decades.

As the understanding of the oppressive nature of the prison system has grown, rebellion has begun to appear increasingly justified. Prison strike action is almost becoming normalized, an expected part of the social landscape. Since the first hunger strike at Pelican Bay Prison in California, this is at least the fifth major mass action by prisoners since 2011. Heather Thompson, author of the award-winning chronicle of the 1971 Attica prison uprising, *Blood in the Water*, explained to Truthout that in 2016, “there was a faith among many in the media that criminal justice reform was being handled, as it should be, by a bipartisan political effort.” In her view, many reporters at that time “perhaps felt that prisoners were making things worse by erupting.” Now, with hopes for bipartisan reform solutions fading away, people “are more willing to listen to the prisoners themselves,” the very people “whom everyone should have been listening to all along.”

The New York Times, the Guardian, Al Jazeera and The Washington Post all ran sympathetic op-eds.

The killing of seven men in South Carolina’s Lee prison in April of this year provided further evidence that conditions in many prisons are reaching the boiling point and formal political processes are doing little to address the issue. Reports of the tragedy said the deaths occurred due to conflict among various factions in the prison population, but that guards waited seven hours before intervening.

An additional windfall adding legitimacy to strike action came with the widespread publicity given to the hundreds of incarcerated firefighters risking their lives battling the historic blazes in California for a few cents an hour, then facing a future where

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their criminal backgrounds would prevent them from being employed as firefighters after their release.

## New Leadership

The high profile of this strike, however, is about more than heightened public awareness. There has also been a major shift in the aims and tactics of strike organizers. According to Brooke Terpstra of IWOC, not only has their organization grown in the past two years, but during that time, they have engaged in an intense study program in partnership with people inside prisons. Their goal was to both deepen their understanding of the prison-industrial complex and reflect on political strategy and ideology more broadly.

This shift has coincided with a re-shuffling of leadership. While the Free Alabama Movement and its charismatic leader, Kinetic Justice, played the leading role in 2016, this time around, the overall direction on the inside has shifted to Jailhouse Lawyers Speak. Unlike the Free Alabama Movement, Jailhouse Lawyers Speak is not identified with a single state or institution but is a network of legal activists in various facilities. Their approach is more cautious, more oriented toward legal change and more tightly structured.

People “are more willing to listen to the prisoners themselves,” the very people “whom everyone should have been listening to all along.”

Whereas in 2016 local strikers were creating their own demands, this time, Jailhouse Lawyers Speak, perhaps drawing inspiration from the Ten-Point Program of the Black Panther Party, produced carefully phrased demands for the entire strike. They called these 10 demands a “human-rights oriented” platform. The demands focus on systemic issues like ending prison slavery, but also target specific legal reforms. These include the restoration of federal Pell Grants for people in prison wanting to undertake college study, an end to racialized over-sentencing, an increase in rehabilitation programs and several demands stressing access to legal due process, like rescinding the 1996 Prison Litigation Reform Act. This legislation heavily restricted the capacity of people in prison to file lawsuits. All told, these demands reflect an abolitionist approach that sees major change in the prison system as a long-term, deliberate process.

Furthermore, unlike the open-ended

style strike in 2016, this strike set a strict time frame, with a very symbolic beginning (August 21, the day Black prison revolutionary George Jackson was killed by guards in San Quentin in 1971) and end (September 9, the 47th anniversary of the Attica prison massacre).

## New Messaging

The emphasis on universal demands went hand-in-hand with the adoption of new approaches to messaging and methods of mobilization. The media messaging of 2016 centered on ending “prison slavery.” Moreover, the rhetoric of organizers implied an insurrectionary stance, emphasizing in their initial announcement that the strike would “coordinate and generalize these protests, to build them into a single tidal shift that the American prison system cannot ignore or withstand.”

Underlying that approach was the notion that most people in prison were in the employ of major corporations, laboring under semi-feudal conditions for a few pennies an hour. While a number of Southern prisons still resemble plantations (and some, like the notorious Angola Prison in Louisiana are actually sited on former plantations), in many states, jobs and paid labor are scarce. In some prisons, especially those at the higher security levels, only a small percentage of people actually work. Warehousing of bodies has replaced cheap labor regimes. Renowned Chicago radical lawyer Alan Mills’s observation about Illinois likely applies in many places: “Unlike many states where the problem is prisoners are forced to do jobs that are horrible with very little money, in Illinois prisoners are made to sit in their cells with nothing whatsoever to do.” Mills said that many feel that “even if a job is poorly paid it’s an improvement to confinement.”

There has been a major shift in the aims and tactics of strike organizers.

Journalist and current strike media committee member Jared Ware told Truthout the recognition of the varying work regimes across prisons prompted a re-think about how to connect with people. Darren Mack, who spent two decades in prison

and is now a leading member of decarceration advocacy group JustLeadershipUSA, echoed Ware’s observations. “Incarcerated people have learned lessons from the previous strike so they actively engaged supporters on the outside by giving them clear directions on ways to support bringing attention to their policy demands,” Mack told Truthout.

Amani Sawari, the official spokesperson for Jailhouse Lawyers Speak on the outside, told Truthout how this new orientation drew recognition from around the globe, with solidarity statements coming from people in prisons in Germany, Greece, Canada and from a group of Palestinian political prisoners. She also noted the changed tactics led to a different approach to mobilization. “Some prisoners don’t have the privilege to have a job,” she told Democracy Now!, adding that they could participate through sit-ins as well as boycotting purchases of prison commissary items or using the phones. Even those without funds, she stressed, could take part via hunger strikes. After the first week she reported to Truthout there were strike actions confirmed in 11 facilities, with solidarity actions in 21 different cities. Since prison officials try to suppress information about strike actions by cutting off communication, she said she expects to get reports of many more facilities having taken action once the strike is over.

In diversifying courses of action for their mobilization, the strikers drew inspiration from a set of essays called “Redistribute the Pain,” written by Brother Bennu aka Hannibal Ra-Sun of the Free Alabama Movement. His work called for people on the inside to use their economic power as consumers to hold back the money they spent in the system, pointing out that these funds were often used to purchase the equipment used to punish people inside — items like Tasers, pepper spray and stun guns.

Creative uses of cellphones, Facebook and other social media have helped project the analysis and culture of those inside prisons.

Apart from acknowledging the variety of prison work regimes, the messaging of the 2018 strike by allies and accomplices also shows a less defensive stance. In 2016, organizers on the outside placed considerable attention on data and headcounts, trying to prove the success of their actions statistically. Such an approach had an inherent weakness in that prison authorities control





the data and are not susceptible to fact-checking. While Brooke Terpstra provided no analytics, she said the strike was a success for three reasons: 1) the media were covering it; 2) people in prisons were coming together in coordinated action; 3) the people on the inside were controlling the information and narrative.

### **Solidarity: Making New Allies**

The 2018 strike represents a qualitative and quantitative leap forward in both organizing and messaging. A critically important aspect of the 2018 actions has been connecting with resistance in the immigration detention centers. In fact, some of the most militant and effective actions have taken place in the Northwestern Immigration Detention Center, where hunger-strikers declared their actions were specifically in solidarity with efforts to “end prison slavery.”

In turn, organizers in Jailhouse Lawyers Speak have fully recognized the similarity in the plight of immigrants facing deportation. As an anonymous incarcerated Jailhouse Lawyers Speak spokesperson told Jared Ware in an interview: “As far as the connection and why we’re in solidarity, the biggest reason is because we understand those cages .. it’s all the same system.” How to deepen these connections is an important issue not only for prison-focused organizers, but also for social justice movements across the board.

As Dan Berger suggested in a phone conversation with Truthout, it is worth looking at the present prison uprisings through the lens of the 1970s when “a broad popular front against prisons,” was a reality. Another key aspect of solidarity in the strike has been the relationship among Jailhouse Lawyers Speak, the Free Alabama Movement, the Incarcerated Workers’ Organizing Committee and other organizations on the street. This raises the question of how people on the street support actions by those inside prison without upstaging them and silencing their voices, especially given

the repression of communication by prison authorities. Creative uses of cellphones, Facebook and other social media have helped project the analysis and culture of those inside prisons.

Resistance is a permanent feature in women’s prisons, but the weapons are not typically strikes or insurrections, but rather daily acts of rebelling by asserting one’s humanity.

The strike media committee has made enormous efforts to ensure the amplification of the voices of those on the inside. The interviews conducted by Jared Ware with Jailhouse Lawyers Speak have been exemplary in bringing the voice and views of people who are locked up front and center. Given the difficulties of communication across the razor wire, these have been remarkable. Nonetheless, the presence of a group largely made up of white activists directing the media traffic, rather than family and community members of those inside, represents a source of tension in the legitimacy of representation, a topic to be examined when the dust from this period settles.

Another source of concern has been the virtual absence of action in women’s prisons during the strike. While some of this may be due to more sophisticated responses by authorities, there are other issues. In an interview with the Chicago Reader, activist Monica Cosby, who spent 20 years in Illinois state prisons herself, stressed that resistance is a permanent feature in women’s prisons, but the weapons are not typically strikes or insurrections, but rather daily acts of rebelling by asserting one’s humanity. The organizers of the strike, as well as many activists on the issue of mass incarceration, have much to learn from Cosby’s observations.

While the high points of strikes and overt rebellion help draw attention to the problems of mass incarceration, there is a need to think about ways in which people in prison engage in what labor historians refer to as “informal resistance.” This resistance may range from defying rules to asserting one’s right to be human by engaging in activities like sharing meals (what we call “spreads” in prison) or getting involved in sports, music and graphic arts. While such acts don’t rock the prisons to their foundations, they are the kernels of positive spirit that keep those inside strong enough to be able to endure, carry out actions like the 2018 strike and withstand the horrific repression that unaccountable authorities visit on organizers and rebels.

### **Outcomes of the Action?**

As with any mass action in a repressive setting like a prison, there will be backlash from prison authorities. From the 2016 strike, leaders like Kinetic Justice of the Free Alabama Movement and Malik Washington, founder of the End Prison Slavery Texas Movement, have suffered long periods in solitary confinement. Already, those identified as “instigators” in Texas, Ohio and South Carolina reportedly have been sent to isolation. No doubt there will be more efforts by authorities to punish, vilify and isolate those they identify as leaders.

Optimistic outcomes of the 2018 actions would be the restoration of Pell Grants, a measure already partially in motion, and a repeal of the Prison Litigation Reform Act. As Darren Mack said, “It’s urgent that elected officials respond to the 10 policy demands in order to tackle the systemic problems of mass incarceration and racist criminal justice policies that have led to tragic events like the Attica massacre and devastated millions of lives.”

But regardless of actions by elected officials, as Heather Thompson observed, “No matter how many folks were actually able to sit in or stop working or not eat, on the outside, vital attention was drawn to the issue of how horrific prison conditions are and also the longer history of prisoners standing up to be heard at places like San Quentin and Attica.” 🌟

### **A National Treaty Ignored 2.2 Million US Slaves**

**“Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as a punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist within the United States, or any place subject to their jurisdiction.”**

*Thirteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution*

**“No one shall be held in slavery or servitude; slavery ... shall be prohibited in all their forms.”**

*Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 4, a treaty the US is a signatory to.*



# JAILHOUSE LAWYERS SPEAK

JLS is a national organization started by Jailhouse lawyers. Our primary focus is to challenge laws that are dehumanizing to prisoners and educating prisoners about these laws. We are also focused on educating and engaging the public at large about prisoners' human rights violations. We are abolitionist and believe that the current model of how we deal with those that have fallen short must be dismantled. This can only be done by prisoners speaking out. Prisoners must use their own voice and organizing skills to connect with the world for change. The current project of JLS is the Millions for Prisoners Human Rights March on Washington, to abolish (in part or whole) the #13th amendment. Here's a little about the organizing body for this historic event.

## Millions for Prisoners' Human Rights

As the momentum of the National Prison strike continues to unfold, so are the next stages of prison resistance. Jailhouse Lawyers Speak, has announced plans to have a mass Demonstration on the Washington DC Mall, August 19, 2019. With the imprisonment numbers being at 2.4 million, and climbing, we believe a million plus of this Nations citizens will participate. We are not even calculating in the citizens with loved ones in county jails, youth halls, or on probation and parole. The numbers are shocking. When viewed as a whole, we see that the Nation has indeed created another class (the prison class). Made up of mostly the poor and people of color. It is this prison class and all those connected to them that will shake this country to its foundation.

Since the inception of the lie that slavery was abolished, amerika year after year has ignored prisoner complaints of the 13th amendment's punishment exception clause. Instead states and the government monopolized the slave trade and contracted out humans convicted of crimes to private enterprises. Today, the Prison Industrial Complex is estimated by some to be a trillion-dollar Industry. The Prison Industrial Complex is so interwoven in the basic functioning of the amerikan economy, that many believe to end free prison labor, or profiting off crime could cause an economic collapse.

It is not our goal to cause an economic

collapse, but to shift the economics from the human exploitation of prisoners. We do this by abolishing/amending the 13th amendment exception clause. A prisoner's "time" is solely based on economics, as corporate lobbyist persuaded lawmakers to push bills to keep prison beds filled. Filled prison beds equal easy pickings for corporations of taxpayers' dollars, and cheap labor where needed. With no incentive through a 13th amendment clause, the course on how the Nation regards those that have fallen short and the releasing of those in the prisons will change completely.

Join us as we move forward into another chapter of prison resistance. Spread the word in your cell block, through your collect phone calls, on visit, letters, have people to be on the Washington Mall. In one voice we can change the Constitution, forcing cell doors open in every state. Let's demand an end to these economic driven prison sentences and pointless parole hearings. Time to dismantle the Prison Industrial Complex.

- The MPOC (Millions for Prisoners Human Rights Organizing Committee) is the voice of the prisoners outside the walls.
- The MPOC is not an organization, but a Coalition title to recognize a Collective committee function.
- This mission has been in the works for over a year now. Actual work started a few months ago when iamWE Prison Advocacy Network took on the leading organizing efforts outside the wall.
- The Demonstration will be used to expose the 13th worldwide, expose exploiting companies, re educate the people, promote abolition and organize stronger prison resistance outside the prisons to dismantle the Prison Industrial Complex. 🌟

-JLS

If you want to become a JLS member or join the movement, write to:

Jailhouse Lawyers Speak, P.O. Box 58201, Raleigh, NC 27658

For people that would like to support or join this Historic March contact:

millionsforprisonersmarch@gmail.com  
iamweubuntu.com

The financial losses to the California prison system are as much as \$636,068 in revenue, or \$156,736 in profit, for every

day of the prison strike.

For every day of the prison strike at the Central California Women's Facility, the prison system lost \$24,132 in revenue or \$5,946 in profit.

## QUICK FACTS

California earned \$207 million in revenue or \$58 million in profit from the labor of incarcerated workers in 2014-15.

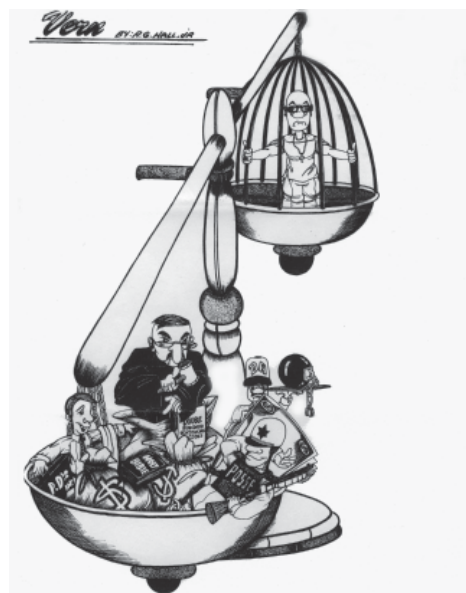
5,588 incarcerated workers in state prisons are forced into labor in 2016.

34 state prisons operate California Prison Industry enterprises in manufacturing, services, and agriculture.

Last year, 4,848 incarcerated workers were forced to work for state prison enterprises. Each incarcerated worker generated \$12,037 in annual profit for the prison system. Yet, each worker earned only \$445.

September 9, 2016 was the start of the largest prison strike in U.S. history. Over 72,000 incarcerated workers in 22 states refused to provide their labor to profit the prison industrial complex. California forced 5,588 incarcerated workers to labor in exchange for little or no compensation. Another 4,000 earn \$2 a day fighting Californian wildfires with inadequate training and equipment. The prison system in California reaped \$207 million in revenue and \$58 million in profit from forced labor in 2014-15.

Each incarcerated worker in California generates \$41,549 annually in revenue for the prison system, or \$10,238 in profit. The financial losses to the California prison sys-



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Prison industries are managed by the California Prison Industry Authority (CALPIA) which was created in 1983 based on model legislation written by the right-wing American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC). CALPIA operates manufacturing, service, and agricultural enterprises within 34 state prisons. CALPIA is restricted to selling its goods and services to state agencies—Pelican Bay State Prison has a contract with Del Norte school district to provide laundry services, for example. However, since 1990's Proposition 139 (Prison Inmate Labor Initiative) passed, private businesses can also set up shop in prisons and subcontract incarcerated workers.

Data for incarcerated workers in private prisons and county jails are difficult to obtain. Prison administrators have responded to nonviolent resistance by locking down facilities, cutting off access and communication to the outside world for incarcerated workers. IWOC has ascertained that three locations went on strike based on news reports and phone calls to prisons: Central California Women's Facility (CCWE), Merced County Jail, and Taft Correctional Institution. Approximately 212 incarcerated workers are employed in CCWF, through CALPIA.

Each incarcerated worker at CCWF generates \$113 daily in revenue for the prison system, which amounts to \$28 in profit. For every day of the prison strike at CCWE the prison system lost \$24,132 in revenue or \$5,946 in profit. 🍷

## 'NO LONGER HUMAN'

### Women's prisons are a breeding ground for sexual harassment, abuse

Incarcerated women and gender minorities are largely left out of the #MeToo discussion. Stacy Rojas wants to change that.

Marisa Endicott Aug 29, 2018, 8:00 am

Stacy Rojas can still smell the chewing tobacco from the prison guard who spit on them three years ago during an incident in which guards allegedly subjected Rojas and their two cellmates to hours of sexual humiliation, harassment, and physical abuse.

"For me, that was torture, and it still is torture," said Rojas, who is gender nonconforming. "I still have bad dreams about it."

Rojas was released from Central California Women's Facility, a state prison in Chowchilla, one and a half years ago after a 15-year term. Along with their female cellmates who are still inside, Rojas filed a lawsuit over the episode in November 2017. The case was referred to Magistrate Judge Jennifer L. Thurston in July and a hearing is set to take place Wednesday.

During the ordeal, which took place in November 2015, guards allegedly stomped on one woman's breast, cut another's clothes off, left them in isolation cells so long they had no choice but to soil themselves, and berated them with graphic sexual insults and suggestions.

While this was an extreme example, sexual harassment and abuse of women, transgender, and gender nonconforming people in women's prisons and jails are anything but rare. Rojas had documented guards' denigrating and sexual comments for weeks, a fact they think inspired the hours-long attack which occurred four days after they demanded to report the verbal abuse.

"This is not something that happens once a month or even once a week. This is an everyday thing," Rojas told *ThinkProgress*. "This is what goes on, and this is how they speak to you. They refer to women as bitches and hoes, and if you're not, then they're going to make you their bitch."

While incarcerated people across the country are currently striking to demand improved conditions and better channels for reporting mistreatment, few are aware of the extreme abuse rampant in women's prisons and jails. These institutions are breeding grounds for the type of harassment that has become a national focal point

thanks to the #MeToo movement. But behind bars, so far from the public eye with so few checks and balances to hold staff accountable, the problem becomes more blatant and extreme.

"You have people who are primarily men in positions of basically absolute power over a captive – literally captive – population," said Diana Block, founding member of the California Coalition for Women Prisoners, which is helping with the lawsuit. "All the dynamics of sexism and patriarchy and sexual violence that are very prevalent in the society as a whole are translated directly into the conduct and behavior within prisons with very little protection or surveillance or recourse."

Between 2009 and 2011, women represented just 13 percent of the people in jails, but they accounted for 67 percent of all staff-on-prisoner sexual victimization, according to the Bureau of Justice Statistics.

In the context of incarceration, sexual harassment takes on a much more violent, humiliating, and dehumanizing quality than what is typically discussed in the #MeToo movement, almost as if it's part of the punishment for committing a crime, Block explained.

"All the dynamics of sexism and patriarchy and sexual violence that are very prevalent in the society ... are translated directly into the conduct and behavior within prisons."

Rojas said part of what is most misunderstood about incarcerated women, and especially transgender and gender nonconforming people behind bars, is the sense that they chose to break the law or be different, and so they may not be worthy of the same attention or protection.

It's like "we made that choice to get treated like this," Rojas said. For "the women there, I feel like people also look at them not as mothers, not as sisters... and they should just think a little bit more about why they're there, what went wrong, instead of 'they're there, and now they're no longer human.'"

Incarcerated women have largely been left out of the #MeToo discussion, just as they are left out of many conversations.

Part of the reason may be that incarcer-

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*Women ..... Continued on page 7*

# PRISONERS AND DISABILITY

by Janine Bertram

Years ago I lived in Washington DC and DC jail staff killed a newly arrested, pre trial prisoner with a spinal cord injury. They threw him in a cell to die without the medication, wheelchair and supports he needed to survive – despite the fact that his family members and some advocates were calling writing and virtually begging staff to get him what he needed to keep alive. I'd been working in disability rights for years and still do but that's when I really tuned into the tortuous and sometimes deadly abuse faced by prisoners with disabilities.

Here's an introduction to your author. I'm Janine Bertram and work with The Kite. In 1976 I was a member of The George Jackson Brigade. Arrested in 1978, I served 52 months as a political prisoner in federal prison. So while I don't have near the knowledge and experience of Co-editors, Comrades and friends Mark Cook and Ed Mead, I have experience and knowledge of prisons. They've gotten far more brutal, oppressive and exploitive since I did time. When I was locked down, I was non-disabled. Then a few years ago I sustained a spinal cord injury in my neck and now experience disability too. I had surgery and can walk short distances using canes or a walker. I hope to be giving you more info on disability in future issues. But before I get back to disability, I want to send solidarity and respect to everyone who participated in the recent national prison strike. I know how hard that is and that retaliation is often brutal. But life in prison will never really change until prisoners come together, lead the way and stop the prison slavery that makes billions of dollars for the prison industrial complex.

But back to disability, 1 in 4 people in the US have a disability. The number locked up in prison is 3 times higher. This includes convicts with physical, intellectual and mental illness disability. That's a big percentage and it makes me think of how important for all prisoners to stop abusing and exploiting vulnerable prisoners. Instead we need everyone working for real change, Like George Jackson said "Settle your quarrels, come together, understand the reality of our situation, that fascism is already here, that people are already dying who could be saved, that generations more will live poor butchered half lives if you fails to act..."

Here are a few oppressions happening to

disabled prisoners, It's common for Deaf prisoners to be denied interpreters for their legal cases, for prison rules and orders so they have no idea what is expected or required. They and their families are charged higher costs than non disabled to communicate and we all know prisons and phone companies already have ridiculously high charges that impoverish non disabled prisoners and their families. It's not uncommon for guards to take away a prisoner's wheelchair for fun, punishment or because they just got up on the wrong side of the bed that morning. That prisoner can't move -has no toilet access, nothing. The list of atrocities on disabled prisoners could fill several issues of The KITE.

## **In a 2012 Bureau of Justice Statistics report, 40% of state and federal prisoners reported currently having a chronic illness...**

Prisons are breaking the law. The ADA and several other federal laws require disabled prisoners to be treated with parity and have access to whatever non disabled prisoners have access to (It's called programs and services). These laws are ignored by prisons and rarely enforced though backed up by a US Supreme Court decision. The few places left that help prisoners get their rights (like ACLU Prison Project, Protection and Advocacy groups in every state) are overwhelmed with cases and under staffed).

In each state there are Protection and Advocacy groups who have the federal legal right to enter a prison or other institution, investigate conditions and bring legal challenges about disability oppression in prison and prisons not following relevant laws Here is contact information for disabled prisoners in Washington and Oregon. (Of course they are overburdened too).

### **Disability Rights Washington:**

206-324-1521 or 800-562-2702 use 711 for Washington Relay Services

Collect calls from correctional facilities are accepted.

315 5th Ave S, Suite 850  
Seattle, WA 98104

### **Disability Rights Oregon:**

Voice: 503-243-2081 or 800-452-1694  
TTY Users dial 711  
511 SW 10th AV, Suite 200  
Portland, OR 97205

The following information is excerpted from a longer article from the Prison Policy Institute titled "Police, courts, jails, and prisons all fail disabled people. Disabled people are overrepresented in all interactions with the criminal justice system, and at all points, the system is failing them." by Elliot Oberholtzer, August 23, 2017. It has partial but important info about abuse of disabled prisoners once we are locked up (post arrest and trial).

## **Prisons abuse and isolate their disabled populations**

Less than half of jails are equipped to offer mental health treatment. Just 21% have programs to support mentally ill people upon release.

Disabled people are also disproportionately incarcerated in state and federal prisons. According to the Center for American Progress, people in state and federal prisons are three times more likely than the general population to report having at least one disability. In a 2012 Bureau of Justice Statistics report, 40% of state and federal prisoners reported currently having a chronic illness, a significantly higher rate than the general population. (While not everyone with a chronic illness considers himself or herself disabled, many chronic illnesses cause serious inabilities to complete necessary tasks; for example, about 44% of people with arthritis report that it limits their ability to do things like climb a flight of stairs, bend over, or grasp small objects).

Medical care for these conditions is inconsistent: while two-thirds of participants in the BJS study were being treated, 11% reported that their illness was not being treated because the facility would not provide medication. The Amplifying Voices of Inmates with Disabilities (AVID) Prison Project reports cases of prisons ruling accommodations such as exercise equipment, specialized diets, prosthetics, wheelchairs, and other assistive technology no longer "medically necessary" for disabled people in an effort to cut costs. And with medical co-pays costing as much as a month's worth of labor in some states, including states where prosthetics and other accommodations for disability incur an additional fee on top of an existing co-pay, many disabled people in prisons simply cannot afford to access the care they need.

Denying medical care is not the only abuse of disabled people in pris-



on. Human Rights Watch suggests that use of force abuses against disabled people in prisons is “widespread and may be increasing”. The AVID Prison Project reports that disabled people in prison, particularly those with mental illnesses, are disproportionately disciplined with segregation and solitary confinement, which have been linked to suicide, self-harm, and other serious mental health consequences. Incarcerated people are a particularly vulnerable population to malpractice and abuse of authority: they have little or no ability to leave a bad situation or demand better treatment. Already in a position of deeply unequal power simply by being incarcerated, disabled people in prison are then further disadvantaged by systemic ableism.

### **Inadequate re-entry support undermines opportunities**

The AVID Prison Project also reports that disabled people are often denied access to vocational and release planning programs while incarcerated, or placed in programs without accommodations for their disabilities. “The way it is now, I’m just basically going back out there with no skills,” said one man from Washington with a visual impairment; his facility had placed him in a community college course without giving him the visual aids he needed to keep up with the class. Another person reported that they had asked for information on how to apply for Social Security benefits once released, and been denied because their counselor thought they should seek employment instead.

Incarcerated people already face significant barriers upon re-entering society, including housing restrictions, employment discrimination, and ongoing fines and fees that represent a significant financial burden. When those difficulties are compounded by disability — especially if that disability has been worsened by neglect and abuse while incarcerated — a disabled person attempting to re-enter society after a prison stay faces almost insurmountable obstacles.

At every interaction between disabled people and the criminal justice system, it is evident how ill suited the system is to respect disabled people’s needs. Along with widespread reform of our courts and institutions, we need to shift from viewing disabled people in crisis through a criminalization and incarceration lens to a community health approach.

### **A note about language:**

1. This article uses “disabled person/people” as the term of choice, sometimes called identity-first language. I respect the right of any person to choose how they want to be referred to, but when speaking about disabled people as a broad category, I have decided to adhere to the social model of disability, acknowledging that disabled people are disabled by societal ableism, and that their bodies and abilities are not inherently less.

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### **Women ..... Continued from page 5**

ated women disproportionately come from the most vulnerable and overlooked communities. In jails, the majority of women lack full employment prior to arrest and a third suffer from serious mental illness, according to a 2016 report by the Vera Institute of Justice. Two-thirds of jailed women are people of color.

“As the most marginalized community, this is just something else where it’s not discussed and that we are the last to be talked about,” said Topeka Sam, a former prisoner and the founder of the Ladies of Hope Ministries, an organization that helps formerly incarcerated women transition back into society.

Sam pointed out that while the #MeToo movement was founded by a black woman, Tarana Burke, over a decade ago, the mainstream media and public didn’t start paying attention until more affluent and white women started speaking out.

Even within criminal justice circles and reform efforts, women and gender nonconforming individuals are often left out, according to Elizabeth Swavola, a senior associate with the Center on Sentencing and Corrections at the Vera Institute. Women make up a much smaller proportion of the overall incarcerated population, making them less of a focus.

But, over the last several decades, the incarceration rate of growth for women has been double that of men’s, according to The Sentencing Project. Since 1980, the population of women in jails and prisons rose from about 26,000 to almost 214,000 in 2016, a stunning growth rate of about 800 percent.

The population explosion means that women have been funneled into systems that were not built for them. Even supposedly standard correctional practices like shackling, observing prisoners changing and using the bathroom, or performing body searches can take on an especially sexual and violating nature when per-

formed by male guards on female inmates. This is particularly true for the shockingly high proportion of women prisoners who are already survivors of sexual violence, as Rojas and their cellmates are, a reported 86 percent of women in jails, the Vera Institute report showed.

“All of that can be incredibly traumatic for any person but particularly for women knowing how high the rates of trauma are,” Swavola told *ThinkProgress*. “Most of the people in jail are men, and that’s how systems and practices have been designed, and so it’s absolutely easy to miss that women may be triggered by some of the standard practices.”

In general, support services and training are lacking in jails and prisons for both the prisoners and the guards.

“It’s not rehabilitative,” Sam said. “It’s a dark place, for everybody. And they’re not getting the type of treatment that they need either...So it’s just this constant violence being perpetuated over and over.”

The especially closed system and lack of accountability for reporting abuse is a major factor in continuing the cycle. To report staff misconduct of any kind, prisoners can file an administrative appeal (a 602) to request an investigation. But the problem is “you are filing the 602 basically with, if not the actual people, the friends of the people, the coworkers of the people, who have abused you,” Block said.

“It’s a dark place, for everybody. And they’re not getting the type of treatment that they need ...So it’s just this constant violence being perpetuated over and over.”

Rojas and the other plaintiffs filed multiple 602 grievances that were for the most part ignored or left unresolved. “You want to make someone laugh in there? You want to tell a joke,” Rojas said. “You tell them you’re filing a 602.”

And when Rojas and their cellmates dialed a hotline meant for reporting sexual harassment at the California Department of Correction and Rehabilitation’s Office of Internal Affairs, the number was no good. “It is so discouraging...You’re hopeless.”

The sense that there will be no recourse or, even worse, that there will be retaliation, can have a chilling effect on reporting. And the utter isolation factor can leave incarcerated women feeling all the more helpless. Sexual assault of inmates by staff is prevalent and often goes unpunished

“That’s one of the things we are really

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### **Women ..... Continued on page 9**

# LETTERS

## A Rap?

“What white Americans have never fully accepted – but what the Negro can never forget – is that white society is deeply implicated in the ghetto. White institutions created it, white institutions maintain it, and white society condones it.” National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders (from 1965)

I’ve lived in towns/neighborhoods all over Washington/Oregon where shootings are frequent

In East Pasco the come back to back in perfect sequence

In Tacoma, Spokane, Yakima, Sunny-side, and Portland Juvenile Delinquents

Believe the best way to be distinguished Is by making their enemies become extinguished

The gangs tend to pick up beefs that they refuse to relinquish

For us violence has been normalized, we’ve become desensitized

Therefore the streets ain’t no place for no sensitive guys

A Top Dawg’s descent & demise, comes for cents on those dimes

So many senseless crimes take citizen’s lives Witnesses cry when watching innocents die

Some murderers & shooter get arrested/sentenced to life

Most other crimes go unreported and therefore unresolved

Citizens chose to remain uninvolved So guilt/blame/complicity, & stigma of snitchin will be absolved

As the madness/chaos/craziness in the streets evolves

LawmaKKKers who war on Afrikan/Latino Americans stick to their “tough on crime” script with no iota of vacillating

Man it’s so fascinating how we all can sit so placid, waiting

For some law to all of sudden come & magically rescue us

We look for the incestuous RedneKKKs you trust who live amorally & indecorous

While chilling in capitol buildings at their desk, the Jew fuss

Demanding they spit out more edicts and decrees

That bring Afrikan/Latino Americans to their knees

So the rich and poor will keep stratified Keep racial/religious/economic tensions

magnified glad with pride

The YanKKKees and their LOYAL Jewish bankers

Finance the media’s propaganda, blood diamonds, & oil tankers

Their wars and distribution of drugs – for the money they hunger

The Europeans is securely anchored To the cults/secret societies

Backed by the Vatican and arKKKdio-ceses, who piously

Pretend to unbiased/pristine, what a sight to see

Lying that they can rule over ALL MAN-KIND/judging righteously

Axing God outta the equation, controlling subjects fiscally

And with militias enforcing their agendas/policies physically

Motivated by greed, intrinsically, The Oligarchs change policies to suit their agenda whimsically

And usually the poor people get the brunt of it

The prosperity and growth stunted, above it

The Government places themselves – taking Black/Brown community’s access to resources, funding, jobs, healthcare, education – right in front of it

With the utmost smugness, pride, and gumption

While urban decay, violence, poverty, and drug consumption

Is the consequences, man it ain’t no questions, or assumptions

About it, the future of youngsters in the trap is clouded

Their schools is underfunded, understaffed, and classrooms is over crowded

Superintendents rule over militarized school districts

Once the proverbial “CHOCKHOLD” is inflicted –

Then substandard education, outdated text books, expulsions, and droppin out keeps our kids constricted

See-through bags/pat-downs/strip-searches/metal detectors

anglo saxon armadas arrive in arid and tropical areas of africa and asia with appointed agents and agenda of accumulating agriculture and access to all natural resources and acquire accounts by way of aggressive aristocrats and accountants who

allocate and appropriate it all to themselves while advocating the advent of new atrocities

asserting their will against agronomical agrarians ameriK-KK an arrogantly fight anti-globalists who acquiesce in the face of active assassinations that affirm arch-rivalries as ample people are associated with ages

old asinine misnomers made by anti-god and anti-christ autonomies who anticipate anti-immigrant anarchist’s alliances won’t accept asylum seekers and immigrating people across borders of america

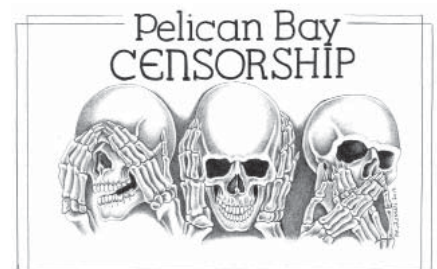
if we’re kept abreast of why arising arrest are always attributed to african latino and Asiatic descendents with accents we see how antiquity reflects the anewed antiquated creeds aimed at antagonizing attendees who attend funeral of associates and family who are arbitrarily killed by accused cops who are on administrative paid leave only to have actual innocence announced by away of acquittals from all-white juries

amazingly it’s an anomaly that’s atop the itinerary of abusers whose astute accusations are accentuated to acclimate residents to alienation and annihilation while animated activists ask for answer to absolve the afflictions like how to stop

abusive and abrasive cops who leave abrasions abdication of the government’s throne is called for by abductees

criminally convicted of crimes cause convictions come from coerced confessions extracted by crooked cops while credibility of crack and crystal addicts is crude and usually criticized yet it’s convincing enough to carry enough weight to crucify in a court

that creates crowded conditions in prisons where people who are confined to cells consume copious amounts of unsafe unhealthy comida and commissary under care of corrections officials who certify their





cannibalistic cops by way of core training so they can crease constituents who they don't consider as human or civilized so civilians with badges have cohabitate in communities where crazed c/o's conspire to carryout sadistic plots courteous of being protected by brass and racist creeds

corrupt cowards on crucial collision courses converging to contact point between free citizens of a communist beauracy and caged up captives whose catapulted into capitulation

contracts become convoluted as condoning the criteria that cuts nexuses off in order to cripple the community's communications they censor calls cancel visitation and collapse collective endeavors to collect cold hard cash

when thrown curveballs from competition, the courage to stay composed coupled with contingency plans to stay calm and composed in the chaos is critical to being conducive in constructing connections with worthy causes

companions and contemporaries contemplate carefully calculated exercises to hone crafts with convert currency so creative consumers with clearance will cleanse the slate and circumvent the casualties and cremating and conflicts against their comrades by positively contributing to a common struggle against the continually oppressive control mechanisms contrived to cool currents of coalescing cliques and cool off the conjuring of coups de etat and coup de gras

committed conformists congregate in convocations to commemorate career candidates in court costumes who try cases and casually refuse to commute the committed persons sentences while the country's patriotic classes clearly choose not to close the gaps between colors and castes so they come up with codes that cede rights from coast to coast and cleave cultures and customs from people

colleges, corporations and companies concerned with monopolizing on capital confirm to jim crow laws by calling for cessation of the racially construed chiding and a ceasefire so colleagues in cahoots with the klan and their consorts can cancel caucasians' obligations to constitute corporation's cubicles with chink coons and crossbreeds who are considered by consensus to be condemned because copulation between conflicting colors compromises correct combinations of dna sequences and codes

destructive devils deflect equality in demographics denoted

*Jon Gordon*

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## **Women ..... Continued from page 7**

grappling with is what system can we ask for that would be better? What does it mean to be a whistleblower and have any type of protection when you're in prison," Block said.

That's why, beyond seeking damages, Rojas' lawsuit is seeking injunctive relief in a number of areas, including the development of a whistleblowing process managed by an external agency. The goal is to be able to hold correctional officers and staff accountable for mistreatment, excessive force, and the use of solitary confinement cages, claiming officers violated the prisoners' Eighth Amendment rights to be free from cruel and unusual punishment. The lawsuit also aims to ensure prisoners can access proper medical care, food, and clothing.

There is reason to be hopeful. Despite the many deterrents, reporting of sexual victimization has increased in recent years, according to new Bureau of Justice Statistics findings. Nationwide, grassroots efforts have increased public and media awareness about women prisoners. At the federal level, several members of congress have introduced legislation around the dignity of incarcerated women, and there is hope that such efforts might increase as more women take on legislative positions.

"I think just as the #MeToo movement represents some level of evolution or culmination of struggles and consciousness that has been developing over decades, so too within the prisons, there has been a changing at least awareness that that imbalance and power dynamic and that status quo is not acceptable," Block said.

Now on the outside, Rojas often feels a sort of "survivor's guilt" when they think of their former cellmates still inside. It makes them depressed, but also even more determined.

"That's why I really have that fire inside me," Rojas said. "I want to let the world know and get whatever help I can." 🌟

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## **SHARED STRUGGLE**

Since 2014 there have been a dozen hunger strikes at the Northwest Detention Center in Tacoma, WA, an immigrant prison privately owned by the corporation Geo Group. There have been two strikes already in 2018. These strikes

co-exist with organized, persistent resistance from outside activists and supporters. The following is a statement released by hunger strikers on July 16, 2018:

"We decided to begin a hunger strike on Saturday July 14<sup>th</sup> in the morning once we heard our supporters would be outside the facility on Saturday afternoon, to show we also support them, and to expose the problems in here, problems with food getting worse, and in support of the families separated at the border and the children in detention.

We want people detained to know we are not alone, to know that by being united in here our voices can be heard outside. So that everyone knows of the assaults and harassment we suffer at the hands of Geo guards. All of us men and women.

People have joined the hunger strike to demand better pay for the daily jobs we do, because we are tired of family separation, and because of the lack of nutritious food. We will remain in hunger strike as long as necessary until our voices are heard.

Saturday in the late afternoon about 70 people from one of the pods in hunger strike were taken outdoors saying there was a fire. It was a lie there was no fire. Geo lied so we would be taken to intake to be interrogated asking us about this. No one spoke. We know of past retaliation for joining hunger strikes. There are not leaders here, we are all united.

We are thankful to people outside helping us, volunteers, and lawyers for their support. It's hard for us having to do this because we have families outside, but when we see what the government is doing to other families, it gives us energy to fight for change inside and out. We don't want more family separations. We want respect, we are not animals. For example, the hygiene here is the lowest possible. If we request new underwear all we get is used stained old underwear worn by someone else. Towels are not changed for over a month, even if towels are taken to the laundry, are still dirty.

We are given for lunch a bag of chips, cookies, a slice of ham and a slice of bread. And then we have to wait until 6 pm to eat again. We are still hungry.

We are also tired of medical abuses; here they only give you Tylenol or sleeping pills for whatever illness we have. Only until you are dying you will be seeing by a doctor. We want good medical care. We

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**Shared Struggle.....Continued on page 10**

### **Solid Black Fist**

A new Seattle-based newsletter for prisoners. A *Solid Black Fist* can be reached at the following address. Write for a sample copy:

Solid Black Fist  
14419 Greenwood Ave. N.  
Suite A #132  
Seattle, WA 98133

**I am no longer accepting  
the things I cannot change,**



**I am changing the things I  
cannot accept.**

### **Free Electronic Copy**

Outside people can read, download, or print current and back issues of *The Kite* newsletter by going to <https://thekite.info> and clicking on back issues of *The Kite* newsletter they'd like to read.

Outside folks can also have a free electronic copy of the newsletter sent to them each month by way of email. Send requests for a digital copy to [contact@thekite.info](mailto:contact@thekite.info)

### **Message Box**

**The only way to end slavery  
is to stop being a slave.**

*Chris Hedges*

**Hopeful for unity...  
Eager for change.**

*David Carr, Oregon SHU*

### **Shared Struggle... Continued from page 9**

are always told to wait until the next day at 5am to receive medical attention, or you will be seen until you faint.

We know everyone here is fighting their own cases, but we all must remember we are not alone and we won't be silenced. If a CO mistreats you, send a letter to the outside or to your family so they can help. When we complain inside nothing happens. They call us illegals, but we still have rights. Don't be afraid, we can win. Don't let the guards intimidate us.

We all should be given the opportunity to stay. Many of us can't go back to our countries because we could die. We would rather be detained here than being sent to our deaths in our countries.

We will continue in the struggle here detained.

We send greetings to you all in the outside; all of you that stop doing your daily activities to support us because you agree no one should be separated from their families anymore." 🌟

Kite Newsletter  
P.O. Box 46745  
Seattle, WA 98146

**FIRST CLASS MAIL**

**COMMUNICATION IS A HUMAN RIGHT**