

DENVER & THE WEST



Special to The Denver Post / Ron Semrod

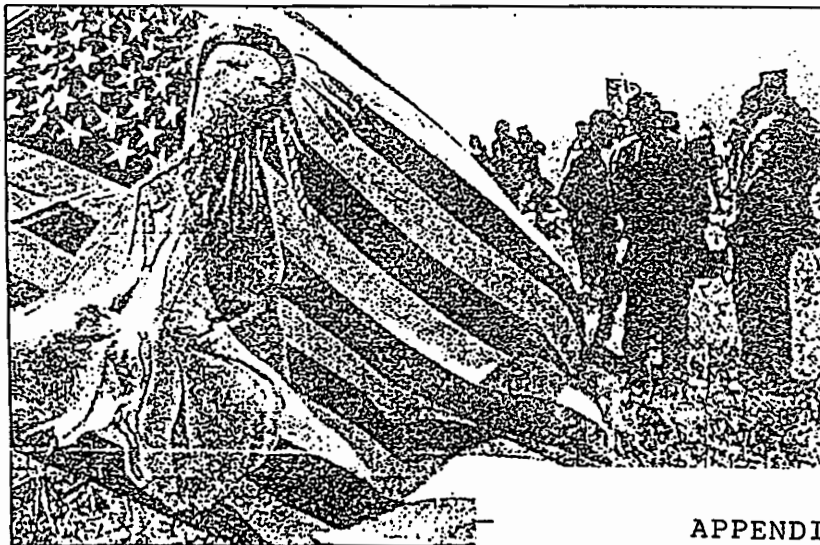
CIVIC CENTER RALLY: AIM director Russel Means announces effort to halt Columbus Day Parade.

Protesters stage vigil at prison

By Mark Stevens
Denver Post Staff Writer

FLORENCE — A motley band of 125 protesters concerned about the plight of American Indians yesterday staged a peaceful, hour-long vigil outside the new federal prison complex here.

The protesters — the majority on a cross-country march — sang songs, listened to speeches, and joined in an extended bugging session on the scrubby roadside across from the complex's main entrance.



Sp

PRISON PROTEST: Demonstrators mill near new federal prison.

APPENDIX E

Among the issues raised was a

claim that the new prison, scheduled to open in fall 1993, will treat inmates in a cruel fashion.

The inmate that the protesters are most concerned about is American Indian Movement activist Leonard Peltier, currently serving two con-

secutive life terms.

Peltier was convicted of murder-

ing two FBI agents in June 1975 and is behind bars in Leavenworth, Kan.

"This prison is being built for people like Leonard Peltier — and people like us — political prisoners who they want to be able to put away and forget about," said 23-year-old Kati

Punnett, who is half Irish and half Cherokee.

Punnett is one of 80 to 90 people involved in the so-called "Walk Across America for Mother Earth 1992," which began in New York City in late January.

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Protesters stage vigil at new federal prison

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Punnett said she was concerned about the heavily automated maximum-security building, which will dispense food automatically to inmates and prevent direct contact between guards and prisoners. "It seems like a weird psychological experiment," she said.

Julie Alba, executive assistant to the warden, said the building's design will allow for "easier and safer movement (of prisoners) for programmed activities" and permit "safer staff contact" with the population. The inmates in maximum security, she said, "are not exactly a safe population."

And an electrical contrac-

tor, who is installing smoke detectors in the building, described the facility as plush. "If the taxpayers could see what's up there they'd say 'dig a hole and throw them in,'" he said.

The group of protesters is heading for the Nevada Test Site, where the federal government has conducted nuclear-weapon testing. The group claims the testing, and disposal of radioactive waste, has been done without concern for land belonging to the Western Shoshone tribe.

"There's a little smeli — as we say in my language — there's something wrong with this situation," said Belgian-born Pol D'Huyvetter.

Prisons, nukes targets of peaceful protest

By TRACY HARMON

The Pueblo Chieftain

FLORENCE — A peaceful prison protest vigil Friday drew about 100 people to the entrance of the federal prison complex under construction here.

Most participants were part of the Walk Across America for Mother Earth which is headed to Nevada to protest nuclear weapons testing.

The event was hosted by the Pueblo Coalition Against Prison Repression and drew representatives of several correctional reform groups, as well as members of the Pueblo Public Defenders office and interested bystanders.

As the group sang songs, prayed and listened to speakers, federal security officers set up surveillance at the prison complex entrance, taking photographs and videotaping proceedings.

"This is the site of the most modern federal prison facility and I have no doubts that they violate human rights by locking up prisoners for 23 hours a day," said Paul D'Huyvetter of Belgium, walk co-founder. "And they will make this prison an example for others."

The administrative maximum prison under construction here will replace the Marion, Ill., prison next fall, housing inmates who are highly assaultive, predatory or have escape-related behavior, according to the Federal Bureau of Prisons.

Of the inmates at Marion, 50 percent have attempted or succeeded in murder, 27 percent have a history of murder or attempted murder while in prison, 81 percent have history of assault and 46 percent have escaped or attempted escape.

Protesters said they feel federal prisons unfairly isolate prisoners and deprive them of sensory input.

"The administrative maximum prison here has two units with 63 inmates that are allowed only five hours of recreation per week," said Fred Apple, executive assis-

tant at Marion. "Those inmates are in protective custody or administrative detention."

All federal prisons with disciplinary units follow the same guidelines, set by federal law, Apple said. The Florence prison that will replace Marion is specifically designed to house maximum-security inmates. The Marion prison was not, according to the bureau.

In two other units, 54 inmates at Marion are allowed seven hours of recreation per week. General population, intermediate transfer and pre-transfer units have 179 inmates and they have 11 or more hours a week outside their cells, Apple said.

The new Florence prison is designed to be a safer environment, offering more inmate mobility than Marion, with less physical staff contact, according to the bureau.

The administrative maximum prison also will allow more activities for inmates. They will have visits with family, friends, attorneys, telephone privileges, work, religious and education programs.

Prison protesters like Ellen Klaver of Niwot said prisons seem to be a way of life in the United States. D'Huyvetter, 30, said the United States has a higher percentage of prisoners than other countries around the world.

"There is something wrong when you have all these prisons. I say it is a violation of human rights and a display of racism," D'Huyvetter said.

Protesters also urged action on environmental issues, opposition to nuclear testing and disarmament.

"People are raping the Earth before our eyes and we are trying to stand up and do something about it for the next generation. Many people are opening their hearts to us along the way because they want to learn about nuclear testing on Indian lands," D'Huyvetter said.



Chieftain photo by Tracy Harmon

Thomas Oso (left) and Francisco Coca, both of Aguilar, chant and beat a drum ... as they lead walkers to a prison protest vigil at Florence

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An unidentified man videotaped a procession of "For Mother Earth" members Friday from behind a police line set up at the entrance to the federal prison complex being built south of Florence. The group

paused in its 3,000-mile "Walk Across America" to hold a 2-hour vigil protesting living conditions of inmates who will be imprisoned in the maximum-security facility after it's built. photo by Eric Hobart

Group protests at FBP prison complex site

Eric Hobart
Record Staff Writer

CANON CITY — Accompanied by American Indian chants and drum beats, about 90 people and one dog assembled Friday at the entrance to the new federal prison complex south of Florence to protest treatment of prisoners.

Members of "For Mother Earth" — walking from New York to a nuclear test site in Nevada — were joined by concerned citizens from Pueblo and Colorado Springs for a 2-hour vigil mainly in protest of lock-down conditions that will be in force at the complex's maximum-security facility after it's

built.

"My concern is the human rights of the people who will be housed here," said Joan Brown, a Colorado Springs freelance writer and Franciscan sister.

Conditions in the maximum-security building will mirror those in place at the Marion, Ill., penitentiary which the new facility will replace, she said.

Inmates there, deemed high-risk by the Federal Bureau of Prisons (FBI), are in solitary confinement for 22½ to 23 hours a day during a lock-down.

Violence and repeated escape attempts by Marion inmates during their time in lower security prisons landed them in the maximum se-

curity facility, according to a press release from the FBP.

About 31 percent of Marion inmates are serving time for murder or manslaughter, 28 percent for bank robbery, 8 percent for assault and the remainder for robbery or kidnapping, according to an inmate profile included in the release. Half the inmates there have a history of murder or conspiracy, 81 percent a history of assault and 46 percent have attempted or succeeded in escaping.

But Brown said solitary confinement is inhumane no matter what the crime.

"For the people who are here for the long haul, they're still human beings."

Pol D'Huyvetter, co-founder of For Mother Earth's "Walk Across America," agreed. The group hopes to draw attention not only to what it considers inhumane treatment of prisoners, but also protest the disproportionate number of blacks and American Indians in U.S. prisons, confinement of political prisoners and "500 years of injustice" toward Indians since Columbus' arrival on the continent.

The walkers, mostly young people, were joined by members of the Pueblo Coalition Against Prison Repression, Puebloans for Justice and Peace, the Colorado Springs Lawyers Guild, Centra Aztlán and Citizens for Correctional Reform.