

MARION PRISONERS RIGHTS PROJECT UPDATE

THE LOCKDOWN: ONE YEAR LATER

The lockdown, imposed by Marion and Bureau of Prison officials on October 27, 1983, has now been in effect for one full year. Prison officials have declared their intent to maintain the lockdown as the permanent state of affairs. Never having been accused or found guilty of prison rule violations, the population sits idly, locked in small cells except for a few hours a week. These men are subjected to daily taunting, humiliation, and intimidation, which come in the brutal forms of beating and forced finger probes of the rectum, and in the forms of continued isolation from families, lack of exercise, lack of meaningful programs or work, and denial of freedom to worship collectively according to the dictates of their respective faiths.

However, the lockdown does not continue unchallenged. The main challenge comes from the prisoners themselves, who refuse to be denied their humanity, who resist the brutality and repression. During the spring of 1984, Leonard Peltier, Standing Deer (Robert Wilson), and Albert Garza pursued lengthy religious fasts to protest the prison's refusal to let them practice their faiths. They initiated litigation and obtained a court order, later lifted, prohibiting prison officials from interfering with this ritual by force feeding them. Widespread support for their fast brought unwanted pressure on and attention to Marion. In response, prison

administrators banished the three to another prison, far away from their lawyers.

Another challenge to the lockdown came, and still comes, from the religious community. In May of 1984, a delegation from the National Interreligious Task Force on Criminal Justice went to Marion to express their concerns directly to warden Jerry Williford, who refused to let them tour the prison. Then in July of 1984 a Washington Interreligious Staff Council's Task Force on Civil and Religious Liberties delegation registered their concerns in a meeting with Bureau of Prisons director Norman Carlson. He acceded to their request to investigate the conditions - three representatives of this group will conduct its investigation in November.

Yet another challenge comes from the Congress of the United States. After a hearing in March, at which we testified, the House Judiciary Committee Subcommittee on Courts, Civil Liberties, and the Administration of Justice contracted with two corrections experts who, at the behest of the subcommittee, conducted an investigation at Marion in August of 1984. Their report has not yet issued.

Members of the Southern Illinois community, in whose back yard Marion sits, have also challenged the lockdown, with activities ranging from writing letters to the newspaper to sponsoring a conference about Marion, at which the warden, flanked by several guards, put in a surprise appearance.

And another challenge, still, comes from MPRP along with

two private attorneys in the form of a class action lawsuit, challenging the lockdown, the beatings, the forced finger probes, the lack of religious freedom, the interference with access to the courts and harassment of attorneys. The court has delayed setting the injunction hearing pending rulings on the certification of the class action and on the recusal of the magistrate and judge, who we allege to be biased against the plaintiffs and their attorneys - us - and biased in favor of the prison administration. The plaintiffs' three expert witnesses - a psychiatrist and a psychologist who both possess vast knowledge and experience in prisons, and a corrections expert, a former warden, with many years of experience in the field - have recently inspected the prison and are prepared to testify to the irreparable injuries being suffered by the prisoners.

Yet another challenge to the lockdown comes from its proven failure. It has not stopped the violence and killing it was purportedly designed to halt - a prisoner was beaten to death in April of this year. It has certainly not stopped the resentment, anger, tension, and frustration of the prisoners.

To date, none of the challenges has tangibly improved the lot of the prisoners. And yet we have hope that the violence and abuse of power can be halted by our continued determination and work through litigation, through education, through the work of people of conscience, like yourselves. Unfortunately, hope does not a lawsuit make. It takes money. And we need

your support to wage this legal challenge and the other pending cases, particularly the one challenging the illegal 1980 ban from Marion of MPRP attorneys, which is set to go to trial next month. Our budget for expert witness fees alone for these two cases exceeds \$7,500. Please join us by sending us a generous tax-exempt contribution payable to Citizens Alert, Inc. With your commitment and support we hope to effect an end to the violations of the human rights of the men at Marion. Thank you.

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