

Akinsbju C. Ola 9/21/85 Guardian

NO LETUP IN MARION LOCKDOWN

The latest "in house" atrocity by the prison authorities at the U.S. Penitentiary in Marion, Ill., has been the recent banning of The Marionette, a newsletter written and edited by prisoners and published by the Marion Prisoners Task Force.

Prisoners at Marion have been locked down in their cells since October 1983. In addition to being locked in the cells 23 hours a day, prisoners have been beaten, subjected to finger probes of the rectum, denied access to legal

materials and denied contact family visits for 22 months. The courts are considering a lawsuit challenging the legality of the lockdown, and congressional hearings have been held regarding the conditions and abuse at the prison.

The newsletter, dated June 1985, was rejected by Warden Jerry Williford because it "poses a threat to the security and orderly operation" of the prison. David Baker of the prisoners task force told the Guardian that the administration was particularly upset because of the newsletter's illustrations which "provide a little comic relief to the prisoners at the expense of the administration."

Apparently four of the five copies sent into the prison by the task force got through to the prisoners, but editor Bill Dunne was told his copy was being withheld and The Marionette was being banned because of its content.

"The newsletter certainly has the potential for pulling prisoners together," said Baker, "but, according to more than one prisoner, the guards were really angry about the cartoons."

Dunne explained that the name Marionette was chosen because it corresponded with "the character and pernicious effects of the puppet masters' unprincipled mistreatment" of the prisoners. "The authority and wealth of a nation of people who advocate and support human rights are here used to violate them, thus dragging the name of its citizens through filth."

Last month Magistrate Kenneth Myers issued a 130-page memo, after holding a hear-

ing on the conditions at the prison. The memo condoned the lockdown because "Marion houses the most vicious prisoners in the U.S. penal system." Myers's findings, which will include recommendations to the district court, will be strongly opposed by lawyers representing the prisoners, says Jan Susler of The People's Law Office in Chicago.

In June a subcommittee of the House Judiciary Committee held its second hearing on Marion, following an investigation of the prison by two consultants appointed by the subcommittee.

One of the consultants, David Ward, likened the prisoners to "terrorists," Susler told the Guardian, "the type of people who would not hesitate to take hostages." Despite this, Ward's testimony and his written report maintained the lockdown should be ended.

"Unfortunately nothing concrete came out of the congressional hearing," says Susler. "But the Bureau of Prisons is obviously disgruntled because subcommittee chairman Robert Kastenmeier (D-Wis.) has said the panel will continue to monitor the situation."

What was incredible about the hearing, said Baker, was the panel's refusal to hear testimony by a former Marion prison guard David Hale, who was willing to confirm the beatings and ongoing abuse at the prison.

A forum is being planned in Chicago Oct. 27, to commemorate the second anniversary of the lockdown, said Susler.