

OFF THE HOOK

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE MISSOURI PRISON LABOR UNION



Issue #5

WINTER 2003

**The Missouri Prison Labor Union
Mission Statement**

-The MPLU recognizes the inherent dignity and Inalienable rights of all members of the human family and the principle that the recognition and adherence to said rights is the basis of freedom for all humans and requisite to peace in the world.

-The MPLU recognizes and believes that all prisoners are human beings as well as political prisoners and have a right to be freed from all forms of abuse, oppression, repression, racism, sexism, and slave labor exploitation.

- The MPLU recognizes and believes in the people having the right to govern their own lives, and to be freed from wage slavery.

-The MPLU recognizes and is founded upon the principles of liberty, equality and solidarity, and that such principles are fortified with mutual aid, free association and free cooperation.

-The MPLU recognizes and strongly supports the abolition of all prisons everywhere, the abolition of the death penalty, and the ending of the capitalist system with its false democracy.

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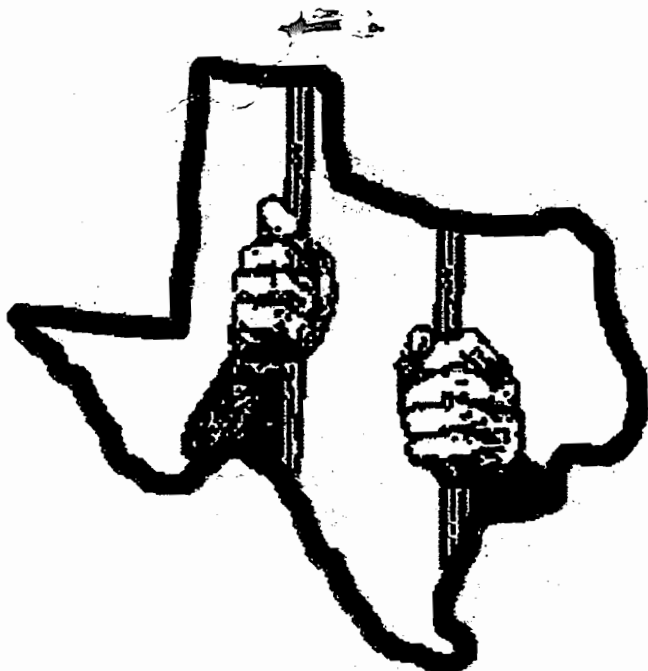
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Texas Prisoners Get Organized!

By Sydney Williams

The Missouri Prison Labor Union was organized by prisoners and supporters in the hope of bettering the living and working conditions in the state of Missouri prison system. One of our goals is to establish minimum wages for all prisoners in Missouri and to stop all prison abuse. We were lawfully given recognition by the Secretary of state in Missouri on August 3rd of 1998 and since our arrival on the scene, members have been subjected to all forms of abuse and harassment by the Missouri Department of Corrections and the prison officials of Potosi Correctional Center, Jefferson City Correctional Center and Crossroads correctional Center.

The MPLU is an organization that fights against oppression, repression, torture, brutality, rape, corruption and exploitation of prisoners both male and female. In this struggle we seek to regain our human dignity. We will seek to remove legislation which acts as a barrier to a prisoner's right to vote. We'll work to procure the minimum wage pay scale for all prisoners - to abolish all abuses of prisoners throughout the US and around the world.

The MPLU is an anarchist driven prison initiative that strikes at the lore of slave labor capitalism. Prisoners are openly considered slaves by the very constitutional amendment 13 that supposedly abolished slavery. Prisoners can be forced to labor, without pay, healthcare or safety protections.

Jerome White-Bey, Bruce Cummings, Sheik M. Moore, and others are horrifically oppressed, locked down in the hole, assaulted and otherwise abused for their uncommonly courageous work in an unabashed effort to break them. This is why I have chosen to not only support them but to establish the MPLU-Texas local chapters so that Texas prisoners may strive and accomplish those same goals.

When modern man looks at the problem of slavery with his 20th century background and in the light of the hideous crimes perpetrated during the slave trade and the abominable barbarous treatment that was meted out to slaves he discovers it as a most shocking and horrid crime. He is at loss and finds it extremely difficult to understand as to how such a thing can be approved of by a nation that considers its self to be based on equality and justice.

Slavery has been and still is a melee of treachery, surmise and violence of one nation or group of people to another due to its expansionist designs and the lust for exploitation in order to advance its own selfish ends. Such practices are and have been the outcome of personal ambition, pride, vanity or a wish for vengeance. It was because of these inclinations that their consciences never twinged them when murdering, punishing, raping, or making their slaves perform loathsome and burdening jobs.

The Hindus believed that the slaves (Sudras) had sprung from the feet of the creator and hence they assumed that they were innately mean and low, a fate they could never contend or change. Therefore, the only way open before them was to suffer humiliation and chastisement patiently in the hope that their souls may alter their death, transmigrate into a better creation. They proceeded further to deprive them of even the will to rise in revolt against the unjust social order that subjected them to humiliation and misery. This is identical to what has taken place and continues to take place here in Amerikkka, but what is more shocking is that they use their perverted interpretations of biblical scriptures to justify their inhumane acts. We need not discuss Roman civilization which is being re-linked in modern day Amerikkka and Europe.

Although slavery was verbally outlawed, it is still a physical act being carried out on the nation's people. It has been hidden in their constitution under the cloak of the 13th amendment. "Chattel-slavery" was outlawed only to be further carried out through "prison-slavery" by that amendment. A fact which cannot be denied by those who profit from this slavery.

Our captivity within itself should have been enough for their exploitation in this "prison-slave-system," but it wasn't so they proceeded on to "prison-slave-labor" monopolized by the corporate elite. To name a few of these slave-holders: CMT Blues, Mecca (T-shirts), Seattle Cotton Works, Lee Jeans, Revlon, Nordstrom's, Starbucks, Motorola, IBM and MCI. Some corporations that underwrite prison construction bonds are Dole, Colgate, Suave, Merrill Lynch, Prudential Insurance, Goldman Sachs and Smith Barney Shearson.

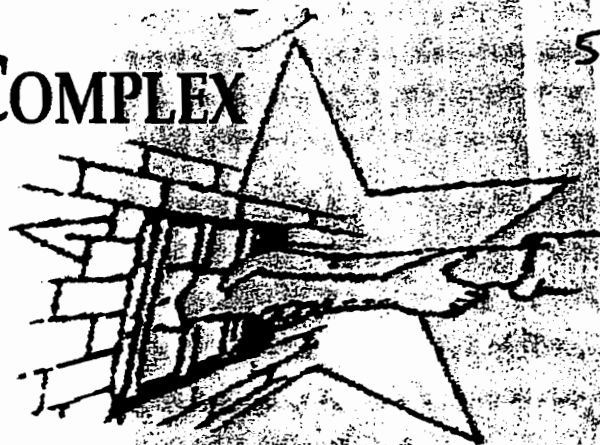
These are only a few reasons I have decided to help further the goals of the MPLU. We will do what we can to help inmates stop further exploitation of our labor and stop all inhumane atrocities that we are subject to by the "prison-slave-system" from their prison slave jobs. We seek to be adequately paid for our labor and not some 25 cents per hour while these corporations are making \$15+ for our labor. By being paid duly for our labor while in prison, we can help support our families and better their conditions by removing the burden of having to support us while in prison which plunges them deeper into poverty. We are sent to prison for a crime we committed and to serve time, not to be exploited by some corporate elite.

The Texas local chapter will diligently strive with Texas prisoners to legally achieve our goals. If you have any input, ideas, offer of assistance, donations or would like to know more about MPLU and/or Texas local chapter MPLU please contact:

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THE PRISON-INDUSTRIAL COMPLEX

By Jerome White-Bey



It was not too long ago that the 2000 Presidential Election was stolen. First, software and political machinery was used to disenfranchise so many tens of thousands of eligible voters, mostly African-Americans. Then there was the interference with the polling process, and latter, putting the icing on the cake, the absolutely illegal Supreme Court decision. Now George W. Bush has been made a fucking hero, the protector of white America, the savior of the Free World. Yet, there is no doubt the Sir Bush lied to the American people in order to go to war in Iraq and steal their oil. Nor is there any doubt that this war is still going on both in Iraq and here at home. Now with the Patriot Act and the Department of Homeland Security tightening their fist, the fight against the Prison Industrial Complex has become more important than ever before.

The Missouri Prison Labor Union strives to understand the essence of this living monster called the Prison Industrial Complex so that we will understand how to move against it. In the midst of the world's great drama, America's march onward to rule the world through the development of capitalism world wide, the prisoner's movement rages on. The war goes on no matter what slave camp one may find his or her self in. It is the time for prisoners inside the walls and those on the outside to realize that we are all victims of social injustice.

I am in the hole again, based on a fraudulent investigation. If you have never been confined in prison, then you can only try to imagine what the hole is like. It is a repressive act against the people they fear. State violence is no a reaction against violent actions but against effective ones. Over the past year I have received many letters asking me what is going on with the MPLU. Well to be truthful not too much except that the prison officials keep putting us in the hole, keep transferring us from one slave camp to another. Frame-up and conspiracy has become a way of life for us in Missouri.

From broken promises to lack of support to no support, nothing is new to us. for this is all part of the struggle. "Give Up" never has become our war cry, "for the can never get us all!" It is well know for some time now that the prison officials try to isolate us, try to break our spirits, keep us apart from each other all in order to stop us from organizing other prisoners into the MPLU. The MPLU is not something that is about to just go away or become something of the past, for we are in this to win it. The enemy keeps trying to shut us down, so we must be doing something right. In the struggle against the prison industrial complex we must innerstand that the government tries to control our actions of resistance by placing the so-called democratic road block before us. We must resist the whole system in a progressive and revolutionary manner. Others may look upon what I am doing here as an act of courage, commitment, or determination but for me it is an act of survival. I'm fighting for my right to be a Human Being, and after 26 years of struggling within the belly of the beast this struggle has become a way of life for me. As political prisoners we must form a prisoners' movement all across the world, and encourage others to organize themselves with in the belly of the beast.

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Support For The MPLU Agenda

by Sheik Mark Moore El

The political prisoner's of the Missouri Prison Labor Union (MPLU) movement have formed an organization instrumental in helping the development of a united movement around issues of incarceration, human rights, the judicial system, and prison support from citizens. The MPLU also aids prisoners in their struggle against the prison system that abuses prisoners arbitrarily, which cause cruel and unusual punishment by the hands of prison officials armed with the protection of the United States government. The MPLU seeks to use social and political expression to end all the wrong acts and deeds of the prison system, which is not for the good of the vast majority of the people in the United States. The MPLU seeks the abolishment of this capitalist type of system that promotes wrong doing by the rich and powerful corporations over providing help for the poor and those who are being punished for trying to rise above poverty. We must organize our resources to support and be allies to all groups fighting against issues that are hurting the majority of the people. This must be carried on by groups and among the masses in the communities.

We are trying to inform the People on a large scale of the righteousness of our struggle and the necessity of their full participation and support. We are trying to organize our communities throughout the United States to speak out against all immoral and social illness wherever they exist. We as a People must understand race and class as they relate to our existence and their role in putting the people in poverty and criminalizing the poor who try to resist from being poor. We must examine closely the criminal injustice system and how laws are applied by the collective analysis of the rich in order to create racial disparities and divide the have-nots, who are the vast majority of the people and are for a more just society, but are not waging a common struggle. We are becoming collaborators in genocide when we do not stand up in vast numbers to be seen, heard, and acknowledged. The MPLU is trying to get the people to analyze the power of politics, social control, laws, racism, sexism, economics, etc. The MPLU movement has grasped how each of these issues profoundly affects the lives of those who are poor and in poverty. We are acting in the interest of these people in trying to build from state to state.

The MPLU accepts those independent groups who have already united to fight all the elements of oppression, poverty, injustice, and incarceration. Many groups have already taken the initiative to start a network process to build ideas. We must work with other organizations to unite around the issues that affect the people. This is the purpose and objective of the MPLU's "The People's Concern." Whether you work with the MPLU or another organization of liberation, what should be important is that the work you do is for the people, and that you truly see that an injustice and injury to one is an injustice and injury to all. The MPLU is not trying to change the ideas of those groups who are currently active. We seek to compliment the work

As state repression increases more and more activists are facing prison time, detention, etc for speaking out. Prisoners who are incarcerated for their political beliefs and acts are being denied parole. Prisoners who went to prison for social crimes are coming to consciousness about the true nature of incarceration. These are issues that activists are often fighting around, not necessarily by choice, but because all around support is needed. The MPLU is aimed at getting prisoners, community people, activists, anti-colonialists, independents and others to learn from each other, communicate, and work together around various campaigns; we must find ways to educate each other with our experience and the experience of those who we are working with. The MPLU believe in connecting with other movements that understand the issues of the people and is willing to work actively for the people to see the grow of the struggle in all communities of the people. The MPLU movement understands that we all wage a common struggle. We are willing to work with are support the work that is currently being done.

The MPLU is seeking to form outside support groups on a local and national basis in order to ensure civil and human rights for all poor people. These groups could be involved in work like:

- Organizing a committee on behalf of prisoners framed for an alleged crime through the capitalist court for their political and social beliefs or prison organizing.
- Organizing emergency response calls, letters, faxes and email to continually contact corrections and other authorities about the treatment of prisoners.
- Finding out about prison conditions by going into prisons, visiting the prisoners, investigating their complaints, questioning the officials, and monitoring the prison for violations of prisoner's rights.
- Linking the people's struggles associated with poverty, homelessness, hunger, racism, racial/cultural profiling, drugs and many other issues.
- Exposing the capitalist system of cops, laws and prisons.
- Educating the community, prisoners and others about how to fight against the legal system when justice was not served.
- Organizing and participating in movements for poor people, prison support groups, women's rights groups, gay/lesbian/bisexual/transgendered groups, left wing groups, churches, and other groups that involves the struggle of the people and social change.
- Assisting prisoners in getting probation, parole or a pardon when they become eligible.
- Working against the death penalty to expose it as an instrument of genocide and political repression.

The MPLU encourages a diversity of tactics as suggested here, that could be utilized to help build unity around the country from state to state and from city to city. The MPLU's foremost intentions are to accomplish the goals above among the many autonomous groups that are doing the day-to-day grassroots. What unites us are our principles struggle to remove oppression, expose injustice and corruption, support political prisoners, and to provide advice and support to activists who put their bodies on the line in defense of freedom and the struggle for human right for the people.

The MPLU believes in building a culture of resistance to a campaign creating a condition for change rather than legislating it as a legitimate act. We encourage prisoners to be involved in discussions and to support human rights issues by linking themselves up with activists and resources to help in their campaigns. Prisoners and others should be asked to give their comments, criticism and suggestions for how to make the MPLU better, stronger and more helpful to each other's needs. Our goal is to get the people thinking about how we work and how the MPLU can stay relevant. Please know that the floor is open to comments/ideas/criticism, etc. We welcome all opinions, and debates because this is how we become more effective. We believe in the struggle against the injustice system as it supports capitalism. We strive to provide aid to the people of the struggle. "Prisoners are Citizens of Society" and we encourage support for their cause. We have a network that respects the autonomy of each group to act with in the different circumstances of their own situations. It is a network urging support for political prisoners, it is one that understands that support is only part of our struggle for change. Over the past 25 years prisoners support movements have inspired awareness and union building for an effort to build a more liberated society. Many of the MPLU ideas are worth supporting, uniting the many prisoners and citizens into a struggle that can continue to grow and see more victories.

"The Prison Industrial Complex"

(Continued from Page 4)

Over the years a lot has been said about the evils of prison and why prisons really exist. A lot has been said about the Prisoners' Movement and the abuse, the beatings, the rapes, the murders, forced labor, legalized racism, the pain, the suffering. So with an understanding of all that has been said we can never say enough, we can never do enough for as long as prisons continue to exist there will always be the struggle, and I will always be a part of it.

In these days and time, the scope and range of the Prisoners' Movement has been limited to a very few political prisoners in certain parts of the country. Our approach must be in regards to the whole prison population that is confined within the Prison Industrial Complex (including both men and women prisoners). This thought set out here comes from an understanding of the clear objective existence of oppression. The MPLU is an idea who's time has come. The people must be made to realize the evil of prisons. The prisoners must be made to realize the importance of our unity throughout the land. The Prisoners' Movement is built around all prisoners, so we will leave no one behind. We must continue to look into the mind's eye of the masses to force the change that is needed.

FROM THE TOMB OF THE LIVING, YET THE DEAD

BY:

BRUCE "YERO" CUMMINGS

I have now been in Missouri's prison system for twenty-five years and as the years passed, it has become increasingly clear that the plateau of incarceration that I have reached is the norm.

Most of the prisoners that were in these camps when I first came are still here, and I've witnessed more of us being carried out than walking out of our own accord. The very young generations of us are so overwhelmingly throughout these camps until, even Missouri's most maximum security penitentiaries look like juvenile institutions!

I personally have come to the realization that a serious change must take place now, and within the prison population. We cannot keep allowing ourselves to be place against one another like pit bulls before a screaming crowd of bureaucrats. We have to (starting with myself) bury the hatchet, set aside our differences and start to seriously dialogue with each other throughout the entire system. We have to face a fact; that the private prisons are booming and two of the largest private prison corporations in the U.S. are Wackenhut Corrections, who owns and operates 52 prisons with more than 26,000 prisoners and Corrections Corporation of America, who owns and operates 81 prisons, housing more than 71,000. Prisons represent a growth industry. By enacting extremely repressive and reactionary laws to ensure that such an industry continues to grow - and have a surplus of raw resources, human bodies, to choose from! The Missouri Department of Corrections houses thousands of prisoners in private prisons and county jail on contract in the states of Texas, Minnesota, etc., etc...

The Majority of those prisoners are in white, rural areas where the intent was to "create jobs" and boost or build their local economy. Many of these prisons have completely all white staffs or less that 1% people of color working in them. This absence of so-called "minorities" in positions of authority, supervisors, social workers, or counselors, has allowed a culture of both overt a subtle forms of white supremacy which permeates the entire system. It has facilitated the singling out and targeting of certain prisoners in particular and all prisoners of color in general, for racist attacks and repression.

I am not saying that the presence of Black and Latino guards would prevent the same, if not identical culture because history has proven otherwise. The absence of such makes this racist system that much more aggressive and blatant in their disregard for human rights and their "sickness" in creating a climate that approves such behavior.

The majority of the prisoners coming through this system are Blacks and Latino people of color, yet the majority of the staff are white settlers who have probably never lived in a community around either culture and their only perception is the stereotypes they get from the media. The vast majority of Missouri prisoners are young, Afrikan Americans under the age of twenty-five years old. For many of us, they symbolize our future and throughout the U.S. penal system, they have become our children. I cannot continue consciously, being a part of the self-destructive process of prisoner on prisoner that's being perpetuated by a racist regime that takes delight in our demise. We have at our disposal, the experience and ability to rectify the course of our direction - within the system - to assure our return from this living hell, or make certain that we are not playing a part of our own destruction.

The focus point of the system is not the so-called rehabilitation, but behavioral modification - and security. Under the guise of treatment, we are being subjected to all sorts of behavioral and medical experiments, reminiscent of the '60s and '70s. Many are kept on all sorts of psychotropic drugs as a means of control and forced into programs like anger management, criminal thinking, etc., etc... These are different variations of "group ridicule designed to shame one out of their social pathology." These programs are mandatory for all incoming prisoners and stipulated as requirement of parole.

In early 1998, a law was passed that abolished parole under truth in sentencing. Before the law went into effect January 1, 2000, prisoners were required to serve two thirds of their time before mandatory release, but they could be paroled after having served only one third. Now, we are required to do all of our time flat. If our children come with twenty years, they do twenty years.

A look at the classification hearing where there's both disciplinary and administrative in these control units, Afrikans represent 99% of those housed on administrative confinement status and they remain the longest. Any type of one process procedures or protections that we are entitled to are nothing but a formality.

The focus of repression is on the perceived threat group, Afrikan, Native Americans, Latinos, etc., etc... Most of those who have some degree of political maturity have been the targets of fraudulent investigations to enable them useless to the rest of the prisoners. Political underdevelopment is also a product of the magnitude of racist repression.

We must begin socializing with the entire prison population inside and out. It's imperative that we start to make contact with the prisoner that's suffering mental roadblocks toward recovery. Let's be mindful that the use of solitary confinement leads to sensory deprivation and dehumanization among other prisoners confined there. It creates anger, hostility, aggression and finally, serious mental illness. The prisoners can loose touch with reality and feel their mind deteriorate and become disoriented. Studies have found that isolation as a treatment is punitive, destructive, and defeats the purpose of any kind of rehabilitation. There is no justification for such treatment, unless the authority wants to dehumanize a prisoner and create more trouble with that person in the future.

Another study confirms that, The Psychology of Imprisonment; Privation, Power and Pathology, by Phillip Zimbardo, shows how a coercive environment is not only "anti-therapeutic" but may lead to bitterness, hate among prisoners and guards, and cause a deterioration of the prisoner's psychological functioning, at a social and inter-personal level.

The Department of Justice released a report stating that approximately 280,000 or some 15% of the U.S. prison population suffered from some kind of mental illness. While this is probably an understatement, the question that needs to be asked is, "How many of these prisoners were sane upon arrival and then brutalized by their captivity into a state of mental illness?"

We are assisting in our own destruction, both in and out of the prison, yet we can change the course of our self-destructive attitude towards one another. If we pay closer attention to what is really at stake for us as a People, we will start to come up with some common ground toward communication and its importance for our future.

....Thanks to Shaka Shakur for his analytical views of the new slavery. Hopefully, he'll continue to stay free of these prison walls...

Do Correctional Officers Have A Responsibility To Society?

By Barrilee Gispert Bannister

On 07/01/03 I had a CTS (Mental Health) callout, with counselor P.C. at 10am. During this callout a female officer, R. Davis, was in an adjoining room eavesdropping. At 11am, I went back to my unit. Officer R. Davis was on the unit. While heading to my cell she said to me, "You'd better get to your cell before I hurt you."

I responded, "Please don't make comments like that to me because I've been physically and sexually assaulted by correctional officers, and I take comments like that as threats to my safety, security, and well being." Officer R. Davis laughed, and I just continued walking to my cell.

At approximately 12:40 pm that same day Officer R. Davis asked me, "Who's trying to poison you Bannister?" I responded, "What are you talking about?" Officer R. Davis then said, "I overheard you talking, and I don't want to hear that kind of talk or I'll roll you up and toss your butt in segregation and make sure you're buried back there." I responded by saying, "Whatever you heard me talking about with counselor P.C. is confidential medical information, which you had no penological purpose to eavesdrop in on, and in which you have no business to make comments on, or use threatening or intimidation tactics on or about."

I then reported what took place to Officer Horn. He then reported it to Corporal Deanda, who reported it to Captain Yorn. I was told that Officer R. Davis would be spoken to, and such inappropriate behavior from her would stop.

On 07/07/03 Officer R. Davis came on at 7am. Within the first 15 minutes of her shift, she made a threat to me. She said that she would grab me by my scrawny neck and hurt me. I asked Officer R. Davis, "Why do you keep making threats and intimidating remarks to me? If you continue to do so, I will report you to the superintendent and the security manager."

According to Oregon DOC Policy 20.1.2, "A correctional official's fundamental duty is to protect Department of Corrections incarcerated persons against deception, oppression, intimidation, violence, or disorder." Oregon's DOC Policy 20.1.3 states, "An employee shall not use brutality, physical violence, profane, obscene, or otherwise abusive language or intimidation towards inmates." My question is, what part(s) of those Oregon DOC policies does Officer R. Davis not understand.

By profession, correctional officials are trained to physically and psychologically dominate prisoners, but are unprovoked situations as stated above really necessary? After all, inmates are sent to prison as punishment, not for punishment. Yet correctional officials throughout prisons in the United States go out of their way to subject inmates to various forms of harassments and assaults. Prison is an ugly affair, but must it be made uglier by prison officials going out of their ways to make an inmate's time harder?

In my opinion, correctional officials should role model positive values for inmates, and while maintaining appropriate boundaries, correctional officials should interact and motivate inmates through respect and dignity. Correctional officials should have a responsibility to society to ensure inmates return to the community no more angry or hostile than when they were committed. Let me know what you think.

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