

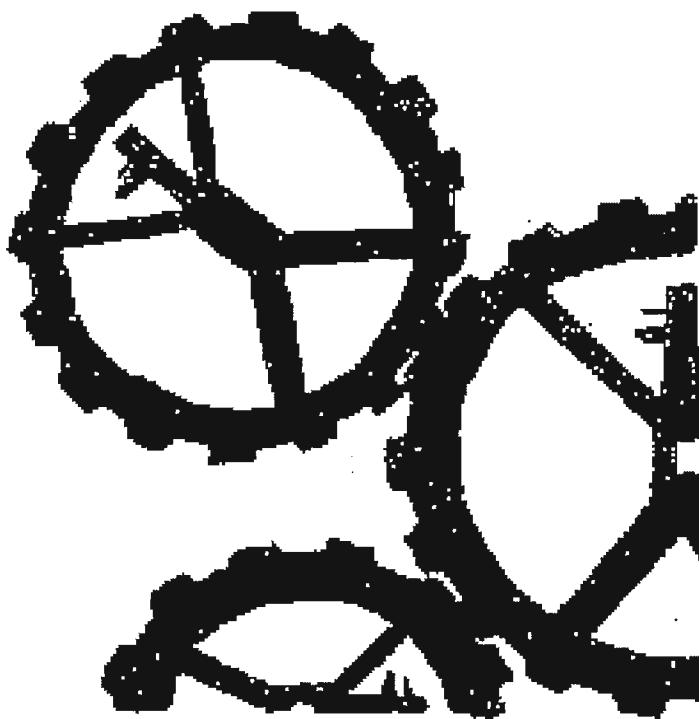
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Free to
prisoners

The newsletter of the Missouri Prisoners' Labor Union

Off the Hook



At the dawn of
Industrialism, factories
were modeled after
prisons...



in its twilight, prisons
are modeled after
factories.

Missouri Prisoners' 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 for 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 free from wage slavery.
- The MPLU is founded upon the principles of liberty, equality and solidarity and recognizes 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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A word from the editors

To keep this project sustainable and improve the quality of each issue, we ask our readers to help us out in a few small ways. Please inform us when your address changes. This applies to everyone interested in receiving issues of *Off The Hook*, but especially to those in prison.

Prison abolition will not be achieved without the active involvement of those behind the bars. In order for this newsletter to be a tool for our collective liberation, it is not only necessary that prisoners continue to read, think, and write but also discuss with fellow inmates, spread around copies of the newsletter, and send in lists of interested subscribers.

Most of our readers, as well as our contributing authors, are men. We would like *Off The Hook* to be a valuable resource for women prisoners as well. Incarcerated women should consider submitting an article or compiling a list of people interested in receiving a copy of the newsletter. We want to reach as many people as possible, but we need your help.

If you are not in prison and you think this newsletter is a worthwhile endeavor, you should consider making a small donation. Your money will go toward printing and mailing costs and will help us reach a wider audience. If you can't send money, you should consider sharing the newsletter with your friends, coworkers, and family. If you have access to free copies, you could help directly distribute the newsletter. Or better yet, print your own organ of dissent and discussion.

This newsletter is edited and published by the Off the Hook Editorial Collective. We work in solidarity with the MPLU, but the views expressed in this newsletter do not necessarily reflect our own. This issue contains language and ideas about sexual identity that neither we nor the MPLU wish to endorse. Any comments our readers want to make about this subject would be greatly appreciated.

— the OtH Editorial Collective

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Please send submissions for *Off the Hook* to:

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Kirkville, MO 63501

Submissions for Issue 13 should be submitted by December 15.

Editorials

We are planning changes for this newsletter. We hope they will begin to transform it from five pieces of printed paper into a useful tool for prison abolition and social liberation.

Editorials will become regular features of *Off the Hook*. They will give us a chance to share our thoughts and ideas and contribute to the discussion on prison abolition. We welcome any feedback, positive and critical.

We want this newsletter to be a forum for prisoners and abolitionists on the outside to discuss strategies and tactics for improving prison conditions and abolishing the prison industrial complex. Prison environments inhibit the ability of the incarcerated to organize active resistance, teach cruelty, hostility, and selfishness, and break the will and spirit of human beings. Any act that opposes the prison environment is worthy of our support, so we are looking for submissions of examples and discussions about group and self-education, mutual aid, and acts of resistance in addition to submissions about daily life in prison. We want your ideas about how to proceed toward a better world and accounts of daring successes and ambitious failures.

Through future issues of the newsletter, we hope to offer a catalog of literature. The literature will help individual prisoners and study groups in their self-education efforts and help make their actions as informed and prepared as possible. Further down the road, we will offer a correspondence course on journalistic writing, which could help prisoners air their grievances.

In order to be effective, any struggle waged inside the prison walls must be carried out on the other side of the walls as well. We aim to use the voices of struggling

prisoners to inspire other communities to build a movement capable of providing solidarity and support in times of need. We will be reading, discussing, and *acting* along with our imprisoned brothers and sisters.

In order to turn each issue of *Off the Hook* into an organized tool for prisoner support and prison abolition, we will pose a few questions that are related to a specific topic. We hope these questions will inspire submissions that will unify the content of each issue. We will still print all submissions that pertain to the topic of prison abolition, but a more organized analysis of the prison industrial complex will help all of us in our efforts to bring about change.

Because any political or social movement must be self-critical to be able to offer valuable criticism and analysis of society, our next issue will focus inward and address the relationship of the Missouri Prisoners' Labor Union to our personal struggles within the prison industrial complex and its relationship to the prison abolition movement as a whole.

What is the MPLU? What have been its greatest successes and failures? What forces limit the MPLU, and what can be done about them? How has the MPLU affected you on a personal level? How could the MPLU better help you take part in prison abolition?

We ask these questions so we can learn from their answers and make a more organized, better equipped movement. We want responses that are honest and complete, but we do not want to see *Off the Hook* devolve into a collection of inflammatory insults or defensive grandstanding. We want prison abolition; we want social liberation, and we're looking for the tools to get there.

— the OtH Editorial Collective

Letters

Roadblocks to organizing faced by poor blacks

This is a question that was asked by a friend who wished to know my view on a particular subject. Please understand that my answer was based on what I've seen and still see. It doesn't reflect the totality of my character.

Question: Name (what you can) the characteristics of the poor that affect their ability to organize. In answering this question, you will only deal with characteristics that describe the characters of poor "black" people.

My Answer:

1.) Ignorant, unaware, uninformed: destitute of knowledge or education. Also lacking knowledge or comprehension of the thing specified.

Explanation: Because "poor blacks" lack the means of effective currency, the inevitable need to survive – by any means necessary – comes into play. And when there is a need to survive – by any means necessary – because of a lack of money and formal schooling, the attention isn't placed on much education about self, worldly events, politics, and economics or culture or on the spread of knowledge from generation to generation. The main objective becomes "survive by any means necessary."

There are many organizations and individuals who attend to the media and present a washed concern while simultaneously saying each individual – no matter what background they stand in front of – has the same opportunities to become educated and succeed in life. Those kinds of statements damage the potential empathy that can be shown toward the problem. Every child wasn't born with the same parents or

mental faculties, so what some can stand up to, others can't. What some are ignorant to, others aren't. What some understand, others won't. It doesn't take a white-coated scientist to understand that phenomenon. Ignorance can keep an entire ethnic group unconsciously oppressed because if they have no knowledge that there is someplace higher than the hole they live in – or know but have no idea how to get there – they'll never put forth the effort to escape it.

2.) Disoriented, Confused: loss of bearings, displaced from normal position or relationship. Also to cause to lose sense of time, place, or identity.

Explanation: Since the day the first slaves were said to have set foot on Western soil, the process of stripping the true identity of blacks, from blacks, has been as efficient and widespread as AIDs, with similar results. When dealing with a group of people who don't have a clue who they really are, the will to strive for an alternative to poverty and shame will slowly diminish because there is no present psychological driving force. This results in scattered disorganization and a concurrent form of animosity amongst themselves that leads to inevitable loss.

From a "poor black's" perspective, the only identities they have are the ones they allow themselves to have but honestly don't want. Because they've been taken away from their original strength, the essence of the black race in America has been placed among the grains of sand in the Sahara that shift with the winds. Who has the eye to find it?

3.) Culture Shocked: A sense of confusion and uncertainty, sometimes with feelings of anxiety, that may affect people exposed to an alien culture or environment without adequate preparation.

Explanation: Every day, a large number of poor black youth willingly choose to fall victim to what some might call a Westernized mentality. That number increases on an annual basis due their sponge-like minds soaking up everything that appears to be meaningful in society.

This sudden acceptance, which is actually brought about by a subliminal provocation, penetrates and sickens an already vulnerable group. Westernized thought has taken over rural and urban ghettos and caused a decrease in African and true cultural values. Their unity has been replaced by "every man for himself." Fidelity has been replaced by divorce, adultery, and abuse. Morality has been replaced by homosexuality, prostitution, pedophilia, and now common, pleasurable but unnatural sex acts. Faith in God has been replaced by Atheism, faith in currency, individual abilities, politicians, so-called religious leaders, activists, and governments who supply these ghettos with the drugs and guns that inhabitants use to strengthen the reality of ignorance.

Truth of self was replaced by an image that the oppressors have been trying to get the world to see since the capture and sale of people from various parts of the African continent. That miseducation has made them susceptible to unhealthy foods, materialism, monopolization, oppression, envy, hatred, politics, divide-and-conquer tactics, immorality, infidelity, distrust, biased and racially motivated laws, and most of all, manipulation.

4.) Content: to appease the desires of. Also: to limit (oneself) in requirements, desires or actions.

Explanation: "Poor blacks" have the tendency to become content with their positions and advertently or inadvertently give up on the struggle to rise above mental and physical oppression. This doesn't apply to all, but the numbers who are content are

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Ignorance can keep an entire ethnic group unconsciously oppressed because if they have no knowledge that there is someplace higher than the hole they live in--or know but have no idea how to get there--they'll never put forth the effort to escape it.”

much higher than those who are ambitious. From a practical point of view, the percentage of those who are content is the number that will be placed in the national and international spotlight. There will never be organization when those who are needed to produce energy for the masses to feed off of have been psychologically made to stay in place at the coercion of history by what they see on television (past riots where blacks were beaten and killed), what they see in their communities (corrupt law enforcement, gangs, and confidential informants), and what they've lost because of this – strength.

Now, these are only a few of the characteristics that can fall under the title "poor blacks" when analyzing and trying to understand why it is so hard for the group of people to unify and organize a team that will focus on fighting mental and physical oppression. I could be writing for days because I study this kind of crisis. But I'm not a black nationalist or a racist – this isn't about blacks being dominated by whites because a lot of blacks are their own oppressors. I hate no one regardless of what I know. I'm only answering a question that was asked. The truth speaks boldly, which is why some individuals are so afraid of it and often take offense after they've been rightly accused by it.

As a black man, I have to understand also why it was so hard for me to unify with my people, become organized and fight for a positive cause. The problem is inside of us – humanity as a whole. The complications inside and outside of this country are escalating because the culture that once kept us strong and able to show compassion for life is completely vanishing from the world. The spiritual beliefs that made us the wealthiest people on this earth have been traded for materialistic items, lust, and fantasy-island escapades. This is my synopsis.

As-Salaamu Alaikum,
Nu'Man Raheem Sal'aam

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Youth who are rebelling against society and why

Many of our children are born oppressed in this world and are being deprived of opportunities to develop into responsible adults. They are being singled out and separated by a process designed to make them self-destruct and simultaneously become a menace to society. Many people say that our youth's behavior is the cause of toughening crime laws and the growing prison population. If this is true, it could be concluded that we adults are as much to blame for the laws and the increase in prison population. It could be said that we just don't understand our youth or we just don't care about the growing numbers of them that are left alone to fend for themselves and be engulfed by the situation that is threatening a large portion of our youth population.

Society's focus should be to save the future of our youth. It's time for us to start

speaking up for them, talking to them and ask them to help us understand their way of life so we can build a bridge of communication and a defense for them from the accusation that they are a menace to society. They are being excluded from enjoying their dreams here in America. We hand them up as a sacrifice to the Government without a fight because our nightmares are recognized through the flesh of those we call our enemies.

We should not allow this situation to get any worse. Look at the population of the United States' juvenile facilities and the prison population. It reflects our children more and more. We are allowing others to think of us as people who put their children in the hands of the system that steered us into our current system and make it their surrogate parents. One of the reasons we do this is because we have been conditioned to dismiss our children as just another scene in the tragedy that affects all of our lives. It is because of the illusory realities we believe in that we are doing good and getting better or that the plight of our children does not bother us. The reality is that we are validating our own oppressive state by ignoring the needs of those that are trying to improve themselves and the quality of life for all people of color here in America.

We have forced our children to choose their own paths toward self-empowerment, but we are not looking at the reality of whether our children can reach empowerment relying only on themselves. We must help them choose the right path. This is a process of personal development as well as behavior.

If we investigated the reality of what 'self-empowerment' is for people of color, then we would come to the conclusion that we have to deconstruct their and our current mindsets. We have to reconstruct

a mindset focused on getting the building process started. Lastly, we must construct a constant elevation of self-empowerment for all to embrace without any having to sacrifice anyone.

Our children are not bad people. They have simply never been taught how to control their behavior and get the best out of life with less bumps and bruises. We must take into account that they, especially those who never received nurturing guidance from their parents or other adults, may develop psychological problems as adults that are caused by cultural, psycho-emotional, and socio-political factors. All of us adults must take the time to raise our children. America is the only nation of people that does not take the appropriate time to raise our children. Our communities have been seduced into assuming that our children can survive on their own. This type of thinking has been the cause of our children's development of anti-social values that keep them at odds with every structure here in America.

Outside of life at home, both parents and children are subjected to an engineering that fosters scorn of each other, without a heart for helping each other correct ourselves. Our love and concern for each other has been misplaced. During olden times, the love and concern we had for each other helped us correct our behavior. It created a mode of behavior in which we are only loved by our families. These values were passed on to other generations, and the process was repeated.

The older generation was not bad, it was just in need of community education on social and political issues. When the older

generation cried out for help by committing destructive behavior and crime, it was done so because it lacked social and political educations. The community ignored them until they started to effect the economy and the social elite, which has always manipulated our community through THEIR media. They have typecast us all as aggressive people and gangbangers. This has kept the generations before from entitling us human compas-

sion. It is not strange to see today's generation calling each other niggas, dogs, thugs, hoodrats, chicken heads, and other previously derogatory descriptions. Most of this generation has not received an education that fosters a higher degree of understanding and produces a higher destiny for themselves that isn't defined and dictated by the oppressors we live under.

Far too many of our youths are not learning this easy lesson until they reach an age where they can only imagine what they could have accomplished with their youth. Why is it that trillions of tax dollars are diverted away from this future generation's education and social service budget? This generation has been cut off, and it is only causing more and more dysfunctional behavior and creating a class doomed to incarceration or an early death.

This is the form of persecution that is being used to kill the spirit and the body of this generation and all future generations. But what is killing this generation even more is that as bad as our enemies may be, they are not as bad as we are to each other. We keep falling for the same tricks. We have very little self-control, and we have been remade through an image that

has been designed to destroy us physically, mentally, spiritually, and economically.

The world climate of past generations was much different than that faced by this generation. Those who lead this country understand how this scenario developed and use it to keep themselves in power. But our generation has a strong will and the determination to be successful. Our downfall hasn't been in the desire for self-empowerment but in the choices made to act upon it.

We must encourage our youth to choose well and help them understand the choices they have made. If we would take more of a collective interest in each other, this would be more valuable to us than all the schools the United States has to offer. It is time for us to come together and help this generation by giving them a better sense of direction and the ability to be a positive influence on others of their generation. It is time to start giving them our time so they will understand how much their time means to us.

We need the next generation to be better than this generation, and so on with each generation to follow. If we do not start doing what we can, then we could become the problem we are trying to address, and one day we all will be faced with the same problems from the generation that we refused to help.

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Slave-breaking: part one

Prison is slavery. Plain and simple.

The Emancipation Proclamation openly ended ancient (chattel) slavery but secretly instituted modern-day slavery. In February 1865, the U.S. Congress wrote and voted to adopt the 13th Amendment to the Constitution, which said, "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."

For this reason, I appropriately refer to an inmate or prisoner by his or her proper name: a slave.

One of the most common and widely used forms of the endless tactics of psychological warfare that I see visited upon us slaves is drugs. The irony is that scores of gullible slaves are condemned to slavery for possessing and using drugs that were injected into our community, but once we're in slavery we're forced to take drugs.

In fact, before the mid-1950s, drugs were not used widely in therapy for psychological disorders because the only available sedatives induced sleep as well as calm. Then, the major tranquilizers reserpine and the phenothiazines were introduced. The drug that I see most commonly used on slaves is phenothiazine (trade name: thorazine).

In addition to alleviating anxiety and aggressive behavior, the drug reduces psychotic symptoms such as hallucinations and delusions. It is called an anti-psychotic drug. What I see done with this drug is the manipulation of slaves. They are tricked into believing they have a psychological disorder (because they are told by a certified psychologist or psychiatrist known as a mental health counselor), and they are forced to take this medicine. The effect

begins as the slave becomes permanently pacified. But then a problem develops. It is a problem for the slave, but an accomplishment for the oppressor. The slave becomes drug-dependent. They are made zombies in that form. They are compliant. They drift to the explicit command and order of the institution. The drug dependency compels the institution to give us social, occupational, or recreational activities.

Also, continued use of the substance in the face of ongoing or recurring physical or psychological problems is likely to make the problems worse (as many times is the case). It is also proven that some drugs have the opposite effect of what was intended. Say a person without anxiety and aggressive behavior is given thorazine, a drug that is supposed to alleviate those

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to treat children with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder. But it was found that, “strangely, in these cases, they have a calming effect rather than a stimulating effect.” Other drugs aren't exempt from the characteristics of Ritalin or the side effects. That's one way to break a slave.

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symptoms, what is the outcome?

In my own case, I was young and going through the various mental institutions and clinical sessions that I did, and I was given a drug called Ritalin. Ritalin is a psychostimulant. It is supposed to heighten alertness and arousal. It and other psychostimulants were commonly used

Join Us Today

There are more than 2 million people in U.S. prisons today. The Missouri Prisoners' Labor Union is reaching out to prisoners everywhere as we strive to build an international prisoner's labor movement. We are encouraging prisoners all over the world and their families to join us in the fight against the prison industrial complex. We seek to build a world free of prisons. We seek to build a world without racism and borders. We seek to build a world where people no longer wonder where the next meal will come from or if they will be left homeless or be abandoned if they get sick in their old age. We seek to build a world where people hold society's resources together. If you wish to learn more or be more involved, you should contact us. See the inside cover for contact information.

News

Journalist jailed as grand juries target activists

SAN FRANCISCO — Independent journalist Josh Wolf was jailed Aug. 1, 2006, for refusing to provide video footage to a federal grand jury convened in January. U.S. District Court Judge William Alsup denied Wolf's First, Fourth, Fifth, and Sixth Amendment arguments, found him in civil contempt, and ordered him immediately jailed. Wolf, 24, was taken to the Dublin federal detention center, and could have remained there for the duration of the grand jury until July 2007. He was released at the beginning of September.

Wolf was present at and reporting on a protest on July 8, 2005, in San Francisco's Mission District against the Group of Eight, which was meeting in Scotland at the time. Numerous witnesses at the demonstration reported that a police vehicle was driven into the crowd of protesters. This action was followed by two police officers exiting the vehicle and violently assaulting multiple people on the street. Assistant U.S. Attorney Jeffrey Finigan was supposedly seeking video footage for what the government claims was attempted arson on a San Francisco Police Department vehicle. However, no damage has ever been reported by SFPD.

“It's outrageous that the court is compelled to jail someone, let alone a journalist, over an incident that involved no property damage or harm to anyone,” said Kris Hermes of the Grand Jury Resistance Project, a coalition in support of Wolf and activists being harassed by the government. “Wolf's incarceration has an undeniable chilling effect on his work, the work of other journalists, and people wanting to speak out against U.S. policies.”

Activists and lawyers supporting Wolf have contended that this grand jury is an attempt to avoid California's strict Reporter Shield Law, which protects journalists' files and notes.

“Local police could be investigating this incident, but they're not,” continued Hermes. “The federal government absurdly asserts that this incident rises to the level of a federal crime because SFPD receives federal funds.”

Although similar shield laws exist in a majority of the states, no federal shield law exists to protect reporters.

Judge Alsup denied Wolf's request for bail. Alsup also denied a motion by Wolf's attorney, Jose Luis Fuentes, to stay the incarceration until an attempt to overturn the contempt ruling could be heard by the U.S. Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals.

Also on Aug. 1, the San Francisco Board of Supervisors adopted a resolution introduced by Supervisors Ross Mirkarimi and Tom Ammiano that would resist the federal government's intervention in the City and County of San Francisco's investigation of the G8 protest and express support for the California Shield Law. The Supervisors charged that using the grand jury is an attempt to circumvent the local judicial system, and they opposed federal government intervention in this matter.

Wolf's experience with the federal government and this grand jury is not isolated and comes as dozens of journalists and activists across the country are being threatened with indictments and jail time.

“The U.S. government's harassment of Josh Wolf is part of a broader, renewed use of the federal grand jury to suppress dissent,” said Samantha Levens of the GJRP.

In May, Jeff Hogg, a full-time nursing student who works with developmentally disabled adults in Eugene, Ore., was jailed for refusing to comply with a federal grand jury that was investigating environmental and animal rights activists. In San Francisco, a federal grand jury has recently been reconvened to investigate the animal liberation movement. Many activists refused to testify for the previous grand jury that expired in May. However, new subpoenas to appear before a grand jury in August had been served on multiple animal rights activists.

Information compiled by the GJRP, which provides education on politically motivated attacks by government and support to people targeted by these attacks, shows that grand juries are currently being used against environmental and animal rights activists and groups that have historically struggled for self-determination. The GJRP reports that in the past year, at least 66 individuals have been subpoenaed, indicted, or both in Atlanta, Denver, Eugene, Sacramento, San Francisco, San Diego, Tampa, Fla., and Trenton, N.J. At least 14 people have refused to testify, and some were jailed for contempt.

In an affidavit filed in connection with the indictment of three environmental activists in Auburn, CA, the FBI irrelevantly referenced "anarchists" and "anarchism" 26 times. GJRP believes that the grand jury to which Josh Wolf has been subpoenaed is part of the same broad and unconstitutional federal investigation into anarchist and anti-war activity and other political movements that oppose U.S. policies.

Missouri executions halted while procedure reviewed

On June 5, a federal judge ruled that Missouri's method of executing prisoners is not done consistently, is subject to change at a moment's notice, and has relied on a dyslexic surgeon to correctly mix the drugs that kill the inmate. District Judge Fernando Gaitan says the system of administering the three drugs causes condemned prisoners to suffer unconstitutional pain and suffering while they're being executed. He has ordered the state to hold no more executions until specific changes are in place.

Judge Gaitan says an anesthesiologist, not a surgeon, must mix the drugs and certify that the inmate is so deeply unconscious that he or she will not feel undue pain when the last drug is administered. He has also ordered the state to have, apparently for the first time, a strict written policy for the procedures.

Attorney General Jay Nixon has appealed the judge's order to block executions in Missouri. The appeal says Judge Gaitan's order effectively bans executions because anesthesiologists have refused to be part of the procedure. Lawyers for prison inmate Michael Taylor, whose case triggered Gaitan's ruling, have urged Gaitan to reject the state's response to his ruling. The state has suggested Gaitan allow unidentified "medical personnel" to take care of the drug mixing and injections. Taylor's lawyers call the proposal "completely unacceptable" and say it does not protect inmates from risk of constitutionally painful executions.

The St. Louis Post-Dispatch confirmed the identity of the doctor who devised and has supervised Missouri's lethal injection procedure as Dr. Alan R. Doerhoff, 62, of Jefferson City. Doerhoff has participated in

54 out of Missouri's 105 executions since the Department of Corrections took over the responsibility from counties in 1938.

According to the Post-Dispatch story, two Missouri hospitals won't allow Doerhoff to practice within their walls. He has been sued for malpractice more than 20 times, by his own estimate, and was publicly reprimanded in 2003 by the State Board of Healing Arts for failing to disclose malpractice suits to a hospital where he was treating patients.

A U.S. Supreme Court decision has made it easier for death row inmates to file suits challenging lethal injection as unconstitutionally cruel and unusual punishment. Lawyers for Missouri's condemned inmates have seized upon that issue in the past year. They claim that Missouri inmates were not being sufficiently numbed before the final two injections in the three-drug cycle. The reasoning is that if the first drug does not properly numb the prisoner, paralysis from the second could make it impossible to communicate pain from the third.

U.S. leads in life sentences for juvenile crimes

As printed in the Coalition for Prisoner Rights newsletter

The United States is the only nation on Earth that routinely incarcerates its children for life. At least 2,226 people currently serving life without parole were tried as adults and sentenced for crimes committed as juveniles. Israel ranks second with only seven children.

An international treaty, The Convention on the Rights of the Child, completely abolished the practice of sentencing juveniles to LWOP in the countries where it was adopted. Only two nations have

refused to ratify the CRC: Somalia and the United States.

One of the most disturbing aspects of juvenile LWOP is the institutional racism built into the system. A study found 82 percent of children tried in adult courts were people of color. In one Alabama County, African American children were 80 percent of those charged as adults for felonies, but only 30 percent of the total felony arrests of children. While only 26 percent of white youth received adult sentences of incarceration, 37 percent of Latino and 43 percent of African American youths received such sentences. In the U.S., black youths receive LWOP sentences at a rate 10 times higher than whites.

The use of juvenile LWOP does not have any significant effect on crime rates. Nevertheless, the United States ignores international standards of decency. Statistics unequivocally demonstrate that, while the use of LWOP sentencing for children has dramatically increased since 1980, there has only been a 1 percent reduction in murders for which young people are convicted.

In 2000, Florida had the most children sentenced to adult prison in the country. Yet, their rate of violent juvenile offenses remained 54 percent higher than the national average. The treatment of juveniles as adults almost universally means that these youths do not receive the special programs found in prisons for children. Adult punishment actually increases further convictions, with a third more receiving repeat convictions than those who remain in youth incarceration.

Those unfamiliar with the U.S. prison system might assume that juvenile LWOP is reserved for the most extreme cases. Not so. Of children serving LWOP, 59 percent

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Interviews

Missouri prisoners protest food quality

The following interview was conducted between a prisoner in the state of Missouri and a member of the Off The Hook Editorial Collective. We have concealed the identity of the person involved in the interview to protect him or her from further punishment at the hands of the prison authorities.

It is our belief that the conditions of the prison system in the U.S. will not change without a concerted, prolonged effort by people both inside and outside of prison walls. Furthermore, we believe that in order to establish a society that no longer has the need for policing and imprisonment, dramatic changes must take place in the basic fabric of our society. Such a transformation could neither happen overnight nor be created by small and isolated actions. But we feel that it is vital for everyone concerned with prison reform and prison abolition to begin opening up space for others to analyze, critique, and act. With that in mind, we offer this interview as a beginning, a small example of prisoners attempting to instigate change in the conditions of their lives through collective action.

The specific topic of this interview is a protest over the food served to inmates in the institutions of the Missouri Department of Corrections. We welcome submissions of similar stories of resistance and collective action for future issues of *Off The Hook*.

OtH: What are the conditions of the food you are served in the prison cafeteria?

The food we are served is extremely bad and poorly prepared. The prison food is

cooked in another prison in Bonne Terre, Mo, then transported to the surrounding institutions. This happens three times a day, seven days a week, and 365 days a year. Once the food arrives here, it is placed in a warmer and then served to us. When this process is finally finished, the food tastes really bad.

OtH: For how long has the food been like this?

This has been going on since the very beginning of the opening of this prison.

OtH: How does the food you are served affect your daily life?

The bad food forces us to go hungry. As a diabetic, I am not getting the proper nutrition and nourishment. We are forced into buying high-priced food from the prison canteen. If a prisoner didn't have the funds, then they would often continue to live the life of crime and gang violence.

OtH: Has anyone ever protested the food conditions in the past?

Nobody has ever protested the poor food at this prison before.

OtH: What did the protest you took part in consist of?

The protest consisted of a group of us refusing to eat until something is done about the food we are being served here. [Note: It is unclear from the response whether this is an ongoing hunger strike.]

OtH: How many people took part in the protest?

About 50 prisoners took part in the hunger strike.

OtH: What, if anything, was gained by the protest?

Nothing has changed yet, but things are still up in the air.

OtH: What could have been done better to make the protest more effective?

The protest was fairly spontaneous. We could and should have been more organized and prepared.

OtH: What lessons can be taken away from this action for the future?

We have learned that we can bring about some positive change by thinking things through and then taking well-organized direct action.

OtH: What can people in society outside of prisons do to support future protests against the conditions in prison? What are some practical ways that we can show solidarity with prisoner initiatives?

The people out there in society can support us and support future protests by collectively coordinating protests on the outside. Protests regarding the prison conditions and the issues surrounding imprisonment can help to make the people more aware of the reality of prisons in America. People can also address these issues through their elected state officials and by building a legitimate power base that can affect the outcome of state and local elections. Collective action comes in many shapes and forms.

Corcoran State Prison, an abusive environment

California has the fastest growing prison population in the world. The state holds more than 160,000 prisoners, as many as the countries of France, Great Britain, Germany, Japan, Singapore and the Netherlands combined. Of the 33 state

prisons that house California's massive prisoner population, Corcoran State Prison stands out for its abusive guards and brutal conditions.

From its inception in the 80s and through the 90s, Corcoran led the nation in the number of prisoners shot by prison officials. Seven prisoners were killed and 43 were wounded by gunfire in the exercise yards of the Security Housing Units. Members of rival gangs had been put together in the exercise yard, which led to many fights. The shootings were justified under a California law that granted guards the right to use lethal ammunition to break up fights between prisoners, and no one was held responsible for the practice of mixing members of rival gangs.

Conditions at the prison did not improve even after the state law that justified the shooting was revoked and national attention was directed at the abuses of Corcoran State Prison. Prisoners continued to be beaten by guards in black masks during cell searches, forced into cells with the infamous "booty bandit," and assigned to the SHU for arbitrary infractions. This last injustice was enough to inspire 300 prisoners to organize a hunger strike on Nov. 30, 2005.

The Security Housing Units continue to be a setting of violence and abuse for Corcoran prisoners, especially for Black and Latino inmates. *Off the Hook* has been in communication with Damon Harrison, a prisoner incarcerated in the SHU of Corcoran. He has requested the opportunity to speak out about the injustices he has had to bear and bear witness to.

OtH: How long have you been incarcerated at Corcoran State Prison?

DH: I've been confined to the Security Housing Unit for one year and six months for assault and battery of a peace officer.

to become active in her duties or just tries to stay busy, she gets intimidated by male COs to sit down somewhere like a child in time out. This is a form of pimping; it's just not money motivated like most pimping. It's sexually motivated by men who work long hours away from home and feel like female COs owe them something. Sick way of thinking, isn't it? Due to their sexual frustration, they inflict emotional sanctions upon working-class women. This is insane! Bottom line!!

Another example of sexual harassment: If a female officer works in any building, she is not allowed to work. They make her sit in an office while they breathe on her like hounds for her whole shift. If she refuses to stay in time out, male officers will follow her around until she decides it would be wiser to take a seat. Inmates get written up if they try to report any suspected sexual conduct [between officers]. Reckless eye-

“
As for outside support, we don't have any. No one's pushing for us and helping address the issues affecting our lives while in prison. As long as this stays the same, the department of corrections will continue manufacturing madness amongst prisoners.”

balling, stalking people in a crime.

Sexual harassment, in all its forms, needs to be stopped. Its side effects include severe depression, low self esteem, and poor work habits that promote sexual thoughts and actions while at work. It's a fire once started that will never be put out. It's like feeding a cockroach; they gonna bring it with them to the next job!! Does society know about this? You bet they don't, and that's why it

is still going on. The BUP can make a difference. As long as we push, other people will push with us.

Love, Peace and Hair Grease!

Mr. Damon Harrison #P14450
C.S.P S.H.U
PO box 3476
Corcoran, CA 93212

Note: Your Interview letter was received by the prison on Aug. 16, but I didn't get it till Aug. 30. Now you see the games first hand.

Juveniles: children face same dangers as adults in prison

Continued from page 10

have no prior criminal record. Also, 7 percent are locked up for nonhomicide related convictions. In South Carolina, a 16-year-old received LWOP for burglary and larceny under the state's "Two Strikes Law."

Of the 93 percent of cases where LWOP was used against juveniles in a homicide case, many were convicted of "felony murder" meaning that they were not the "trigger person." A 15-year-old Hispanic child received LWOP when adult gang members persuaded him to ride his bike around and

report if he spotted a police car while they committed the shooting.

Once children are convicted and thrown into adult prison, there are sexual assaults, beatings by staff and fellow prisoners, and far higher rates of suicide as the norm. Why do we do this?

Resources:

Jacob Ind, who received LWOP at age 15, imprisoned in Colorado.
Mary Ellen Johnson, Executive Director of The Pendulum Foundation.
www.pendulumfoundation.com

Capitalism has always relied on slavery. In the beginning, it was the Africans and Indigenous populations that labored in captivity. Later, the urban and rural poor, and today's slaves are the government's prisoners. The modern plantation is a so-called center for corrections.

