

MARIANNA - THE B.O.P.'s MARION FOR WOMEN

On August 19, 1988, the High Security Unit (HSU) for women in Lexington, Kentucky was closed by the U.S. Bureau of Prisons (BOP). The "control" unit, designed especially to carry out psychological experimentation on women political prisoners, was open less than two years but in that time became a focus of national and international concern over human rights abuses by the U.S. government. The enormous public outcry along with a lawsuit forced the BOP to close the Lexington control unit against its will.

Washington, D.C., Federal District Court Judge Barrington Parker ruled that the BOP and U.S. Justice Department had unlawfully designated two women to the HSU based on their past political associations and personal beliefs. He rejected the government efforts to make it a "crime" for prisoners to be "members of leftist political organizations even if those groups have engaged in unlawful pursuits in the past." The Court's decision in this matter was a setback for the BOP and the Justice Department; it not only lent legitimacy to the claim that political prisoners and prisoners of war are held in U.S. prisons but also substantiated that they are targets of a well-organized counter insurgency campaign.

The U.S. government has refused to recognize the existence of political prisoners and prisoners of war within its borders. It is nevertheless clear that persons convicted of having beliefs and/or committing acts in the furtherance of social justice are

meted out for inordinately long sentences and harsh conditions during incarceration. Even Amnesty International, which has only intervened on rare occasion in U.S. affairs, recommended the immediate closure of the Lexington HSU. In its Lexington report Amnesty ' went on to assert that, the B.O.P.'s promised replacement, a prison to house women in Marianna, Fla., should not replicate the Lexington Unit.

The B.O.P. however, refers endlessly to the "mission" of Lexington, which they no doubt intend to carry out and carry on in Marianna. The government has filed an appeal of the Barrington Parker decision and subsequently a motion requesting that the Appellate Court speed up the process in considering the matter. In this motion the government clearly put forth its intent to transfer women political prisoners and prisoners of war currently held under less restrictive conditions in other prisons, to Marianna. (Specific references were made to four Puerto Rican Independentistas, three of whom have been held in a general population prison at Pleasanton, California. Despite the fact that the three have been at Pleasanton for years without incident, for purposes of the government's motion, they suddenly pose a security threat.)

Marianna Federal Prison, located 75 miles from Tallahassee, in a rural and isolated area of Florida, is a cunning response to public outrage at the extremely repressive conditions experienced by the women "buried alive" at Lexington. With Marianna the B.O.P. is attempting to redefine the nature of a "general

population" institution simply by imposing more restrictive conditions and calling it general population.

Typically a general population facility which houses prisoners serving long-term sentences has educational and training programs, recreational facilities, libraries, a commissary, and daily jobs where prisoners can earn some money. The institution at Marianna is already extremely overcrowded with over 100 women (over 50% of them Black women from the Northeast). Although all of the women are serving long sentences there are no training or educational programs, (not even a stocked library), and only 40 jobs. There is also no commissary. This leaves most of the women with nothing to do all day long, day in and day out. The lack of programs and the extreme overcrowding increases the potential for conflict and violence among the prisoners. The B.O.P. used an outbreak of violence at the infamous prison for men in Marion, Ill. as justification to lock the entire prison down and have kept it that way for years. (The men are kept in their cells 23 hours a day.) It appears they are trying to set up the same situation at Marianna.

There is more. The remote location of Marianna makes visits from family and friends a huge hardship. On top of it visiting privileges are extremely restricted; prisoners are given only eight hours per month of week-end time to have visitors. The visiting room affords absolutely no privacy. It must also be noted that Marianna is a prison within a prison, a women's unit in a larger men's prison. This translates into a situation where

all of the facilities and services are geared and designed for men, including health care.

The conditions at Marion may not at present be as blatantly oppressive as they were in Lexington but they are very bad. It may also be said that Marianna, unlike Lexington, was not particularly designed to house political prisoners (since there are many women there serving time for other types of charges). Before falling prey to this wolf in sheep's clothing, the following should be considered: 1. The B.O.P. has demonstrated its intent to transfer all of the women political prisoners and prisoners of war to Marianna and is barred from this objective only by the Barrington Parker decision currently on appeal. 2. Many of the "robotized" guards trained at Lexington to "handle terrorists" have been transferred to Marianna. 3. The B.O.P. has repeatedly referred to Marianna as the continuation of its "mission" (which began even before Lexington, in a control unit set up in federal prison for women in Alderson) to break the backs and spirits of women who fight for social justice. Marianna is nothing less than a fine tuning of the program of repression aimed specifically at women who dare to challenge the policies of the U.S. government.

A review of the B.O.P.'s track record reveals that political repression is multifaceted and multi-leveled; it ebbs and flows based on the objectives of those in power as well as the organized response to it. Political prisoners exist in many different countries and their treatment is affected by the amount

of public exposure and resistance. Many governments acknowledge the presence of political prisoners in their jails. The lesson of Lexington is that we must constantly expose the myth that there are no political prisoners or prisoners of war in the United States. Once we do that its easier to recognize and put to a halt the human rights violations committed against political prisoners and prisoners of war in the U.S. every day.

Marianna must be shut down. We cannot allow a "Marion for Women" to go forward while we watch passively. At this point its important to write the director of the B.O.P. about its differential treatment of political prisoners and prisoners of war. We can neither let the racist policy of placing such a disproportionate number of Black women in this rural area, nor the general indecent conditions which all the women at Marianna must face, go unnoticed.

We should also direct attention to Judge Barrington Parker and urge him to enforce his decision which requires that women political prisoners be placed in general population facilities.

Quinlan's address.

Parker's address.

We urge you to support the effort to prevent a control unit at Marianna, Fla., as well as other human rights violations directed at political prisoners and prisoners of war, by sending donations to (Name of Organization)>

You may also contact (Name of Organization) for further information. Addresses (New York, Chicago, San Francisco).