

PONTIAC PRISONERS SUPPORT COALITION NEWSLETTER

NO. 1

OCT. '78

WHO WE ARE

The Pontiac Prisoners Support Coalition is a broad-based coalition of community and human rights organizations. We share the conviction that the Pontiac prisoners' rebellion of July 22nd was a natural and predictable act of resistance to the inhuman treatment of prisoners, most of whom are Black and Latino.

We understand that this inhuman treatment begins "outside" in the community where Black and Latino people are expected to accept the lowest paying jobs, worst housing, poorest education, highest unemployment, police occupation of their communities and all the other racist institutions of this society.

Those men and women who do not accept this oppression and who organize against it are warehoused in cages in overcrowded prisons and jails where slave labor, inhuman conditions and arbitrary rules are enforced by racist guards.

The state has designed two new repressive weapons for those who further resist: Class X legislation and the death penalty.

Prisoners are kept under deadlock--caged in overcrowded cells 24 hours a day, isolated from friends and family--while an investigation of the rebellion is being conducted. Investigators offer bribes of shortened sentences and threats of the electric chair to coerce "witnesses" to cooperate in the state's attempt to frame scapegoats. The Department of Corrections and Governor Thompson have promised to demand the death penalty for those charged in the rebellion--a rebellion for which they themselves are, in fact, responsible.

OUR PRINCIPLES OF UNITY

The Pontiac Prisoners Support Coalition respects and supports the initiatives of prisoners, takes leadership from them and unites with them on the following principles:

-Demand the abolition of all inhuman and abusive conditions at Pontiac and other

Illinois prisons.

-Repeal Class X legislation

-Revoke the death penalty

-Expose the investigation and its coercive strategy to scapegoat prisoners.

Further, we have taken responsibility for:

-Educating primarily white people about the racist nature of the prison system.

-Combatting anti-prisoner, racist attitudes and practice.

-Winning support for the demands of the prisoners.

-Providing political and legal support for the prisoners who will be charged.

HELP

The Pontiac Prisoners Support Coalition needs political and financial support. The funds we raise will go to the political and legal defense of the Pontiac brothers. We urge you to participate energetically.

RETURN THIS FORM TO THE PPSC

2955 E. 88th
Chicago 60617

YES I can arrange for PPSC to show its slide show, films or speakers at my home, community, trade union or church group.

YES I enclose a \$ _____ donation to PPSC (Please make checks payable to Pontiac Prisoners Support Coalition)

YES Please send me _____ copies of PPSC literature to distribute.

YES Please put me on the PPSC mailing list. My address is _____

Hearings including prisoners' testimony, continue. Supporters inside the courtroom are essential. Come to Room 2325 Federal Building, 219 S. Dearborn. Call the Peoples Law Office--663-5046--for hearing dates and times.

FROM THE PONTIAC-STATEVILLE

PRESS RELEASE

"WE ARE MEN, NOT BEASTS AND REFUSED TO BE BEATEN AND DRIVEN AS SUCH!" (L.D. Barkley: Attica State Prison; September 9-13, 1971)

A total of sixteen prisoners came from both Pontiac and Stateville prisons to pursue a suit which challenges the continued existence of the present deadlocks at those institutions. Their suit also challenges deprivations of rights which are guaranteed by the First, Fifth, Sixth, Eighth, Thirteenth and Fourteenth Amendments to the United States Constitution.

Lawyers from the Attorney General's Office have gone to great lengths throughout a week of proceedings to prevent the Court from ruling on the unconstitutionality of the deadlocks.

The Office of the Governor, the Dept. of Corrections and the Illinois Dept. of Law Enforcement are fearful that conditions inside the prisons will be exposed. Conditions which have been systematically created and which have contributed to the deaths of both guards and prisoners over the past several years. They are afraid that the Court will be forced to issue an order which will hold the Dept. of Corrections accountable for their past and present actions, and which will prevent them from trampling over the lives of prisoners and their families in the future in flagrant disregard of the most basic of human rights.

FAMILY VISITS

One of these most basic rights, guaranteed by the First Amendment, is the right of prisoners to receive visits from their family and friends.

On the first day of the proceedings, the Court heard the testimony of Sister Tarajee Muhammad, the mother of two male children. Sister Tarajee is married to Bro. Hassan Muhammad who is presently imprisoned at Pontiac. Sister Muhammad's testimony graphically illustrated the degree to which the deprivations of prisoners affect their families, and consequently their communities. The children of the Muhammad family have been touched in various ways -- many of which are very deep and lasting -- by the inability to visit with their father.

If we multiply the situation at Pontiac

and Stateville considering the 5,536 prisoners and their total number of family and friends, we arrive at a picture which shows the degree to which the deadlock at Pontiac and Stateville contribute to the over all social deterioration of the Black, Bilalian, Latino and Third World Community.

DEPRIVATION AND CRUEL PUNISHMENT

The flagrant violations of the right to Due Process couldn't have been expounded on more lucidly than in the testimony of Donald T. Taylor from Pontiac and Ms. Jeanette Musengo, Director of the Illinois Prisons and Jails Project. Mr. Taylor told the packed courtroom that "he hadn't showered since July 17, 1978; that his cell is flooded constantly by a leaky toilet; that depression and mental turmoil he blames on the lockup has greatly aggravated his colitis; and that the food is unappetizing, non-nutritious and infested with insects." Ms. Musengo related how the "food is trundled to the cells in open containers and placed on paper plates that have to be folded nearly in half as they are shoved through the bars. In the process, food is spilled on the floors and galleries and what remains is mushed together. The result, people were furious, the anger was just incredible." These deprivations were incurred although the Cell House Mr. Taylor lived in played no role in the July 22nd Rebellion.

Bro. Hassan Muhammad's suffering demonstrates vividly the callous nature of prison officials took toward all prisoners. Bro. Muhammad had been prescribed a soft bland medical diet by the prison doctors for an ulcer stomach, rectal bleeding and pain, yet the prison officials refused to allow Mr. Muhammad his medical diet and boldly retorted they would block all avenues of his ever obtaining his diet again.

Bro. Muhammad, a member of the World Community of Al-Islam in the West, cannot and will not eat pork because of religious belief. Yet before and during the total lockup Mr. Muhammad's total or major portion of his meal was pork in some form or fashion. Pork oil and grease were always mixed with other dishes served and substitutes for pork were hardly ever offered. Mr. Muhammad could not attend any religious services and was repeatedly interrupted by uninformed and uncaring guards as he attempted to offer his daily prayers.

COORDINATING COMMITTEE

OPEN LETTER

His testimony clearly represents the treatment of prisoners generally and describes cruel and unusual punishment as prohibited by the U.S. Constitution, where treatment amounts to torture when it is grossly excessive in proportion to the offense (Mr. Muhammad and most prisoners committed no offense), when treatment is inherently unfair, and unnecessarily degrading.

CHATTEL SLAVERY

The population of both prisons is approximately 80% Black and Latino. This composition in racial cultural character of the prisons has come about over the past 10 years, and is a prime factor in the conscious disregard of the prison system by the Department of Corrections, the Legislature and the propaganda they issue to confuse and sway the public.

The analogy to the conditions of chattel slavery and our claim that the treatment of prisoners violates the 13th Amendment is clearly shown by the Dept. of Corrections' treatment of prisoners as "property" or as inanimate objects, rather than as persons who -- even though imprisoned -- are entitled to all constitutional rights. Unless there have been constitutional curtailments of these rights which satisfy the requirements of due process -- which has not been the case under the "deadlock" conditions at Pontiac and Stateville.

All access to legal counsel, law library, attorney visitation were cut off in violation of the 5th, 6th and 14th Amendments to the United States Constitution. Thomas Vogt, a prisoner at Pontiac, testified in open court that his direct appeal was dismissed in U.S. District Court, as a direct result of prison officials failure to post legal documents. He further testified that in the 7th Circuit his pro-se motion for appointment of counsel was denied for lack of arguable merit due to failure of prison officials to allow him access to the law library.

ISOLATION AND COERCION

Such a situation created an atmosphere in which the prisoners are held in complete isolation not only from other prisoners, but from the outside world as well. The refusal to allow prisoner access to attorney, etc., while a massive criminal investigation is being conducted is designed by

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The Brothers of the Pontiac-Stateville Coordinating Committee wish to take this brief opportunity to extend our greetings and appreciation to the families and supporters of all the prisoners at Pontiac and Stateville.

The presence of many of you in the courtroom during the past week has demonstrated your concern over our shared plight and the effort to put an end to our oppressive situation. It has also given us the inspiration and strength to continue the struggle -- against all odds -- until victory.

It has become evident during the past week that the suffering and frustrations of men and women inside prison are shared by -- and affect -- our families, friends, and members of our communities, and is a conscious part of the systematic economic exploitation, political oppression, and socio-cultural aspect of genocide as practiced against Blacks, Latinos, other Third World peoples, and members of the working class.

We look forward to your continued support, as we will continue to make right the wrongs that have been done to us. We will also continue to expose the criminality of the Department of Corrections in dealing

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On September 18, some 200 people, mostly from Chicago's Black community, staged a militant demonstration outside Pontiac State Penitentiary. They raised the prisoners' demands: end the deadlock; restore visiting rights; end the frame-up. The PPSC supported this demonstration.

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the prison officials to intensify and aggravate an already existing psychologically and physically coercive and oppressive atmosphere within which the prisoners exist. Where they also face individual interrogation without counsel by State officials.

Testimony given by Mike Walton from Pontiac described in detail how correctional officials provided unlimited assistance to State investigators investigating the deaths of three guards. The department assisted the investigation by: creating a psychologically, emotionally and physically coercive prison environment; isolating the prison population from family, friends and community supportive organizations; offering opportunist and mercenary elements within the prison early parole or transfer to minimum security for testimony against certain individuals the department may "feel" are responsible. Frequently prisoners were informed by law enforcement and prison officials during interrogation sessions or in their cells that the dead-lock at Pontiac would continue until prisoners decided to cooperate. Prisoners are constantly threatened with indictments and reminded -- of the possibility of the death penalty.

DUPLICITY, DECEPTION AND PERJURY

Beginning with the placement of the prisons on dead-lock status, the Gov. James Thompson, DOC Director Charles Rowe, and their subordinates have engaged in various forms of duplicity, deception, and violation of public trust, which verifies the truth as expressed in the suit, and by testimony by prisoners and persons from prison watch-dog groups.

The most glaring instance of this was during the testimony of Charles Rowe, where he was caught in the act of perjury by attorneys for the prisoners, and caught committing fraud by Judge Crowley.

Rowe had testified on the witness stand that the lock-up at Pontiac had to be maintained because of the level of prisoner hostility, lack of staff, and the need for a continuing investigation into the events of July 22nd.

But attorneys for prisoners were able to point to an earlier affidavit and deposition given by Rowe in which he made clear his intention to end the lock-up on Sept. 18, but hostility of guards at a meeting on Sept. 13th, prevented this move.

Judge Crowley discovered the DOC's at-

tempt to substitute a new document for one which showed the falsity of the claim that a continuing investigation was necessary and was preventing the end to the dead-lock.

A POLITICALLY MOTIVATED ACTION

Given all of the above, we can say that the following has clearly but undisputably been demonstrated:

(1) That prisoners were and are victims of the grossly racist, immoral, and criminal prison system;

(2) That the DOC respects neither human rights nor laws, but apparently acts as a law unto itself; and

(3) That this is a politically motivated action on the part of prisoners, their organizations, families, friends, and supporters, aimed at challenging the illegal actions of the department, and pointing out that these actions of the DOC are but trial runs to test the extent to which they can pressure prisoners without fear of community powers to correct or combat them.

If this is in fact clearly evident then we can say that this has been a successful step in the ongoing struggle which lies ahead of us.

Build to Win!

Pontiac-Stateville Coordinating Committee

September 30, 1978

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with prisoners and their families.

We will continue our efforts to pull the rug from under the state's planned attempt to railroad Brothers at Pontiac in the classic amerikkkan fashion of legal lynching as a means of intimidating the oppressed and covering the crimes of the oppressors.

We're assured of victory in this struggle by the love, concern, and involvement of our families, friends and supporters. Without all of you the struggle would have been much harder, and victory more uncertain. Words can't express our feelings, but we're sure that all of you have the love for us that we have for you.

Thank You!

and

The Struggle Continues, as we
Build To Win!

9-28-78