

PPs, Mass Incarceration and What's Possible for Social Movements

America has millions of prisoners locked away in its dungeons, many for 20, 30 and 40 years or more - yet astonishingly, it claims there are no Political Prisoners or Political Prisoners of War (PP/POWs) in its prisons - and that it has no PPs.

That makes the u.s. the only country in the world that has MASS INCARCERATION, has more prisoners period than any other country - and has prisoners locked in secret CIA prisons around the world, but no PPs.

Since it has no PPs it obviously has no masses of poor, hungry, homeless or unemployed people, nor does it have hordes of oppressed nationalities and lower classes herded into reservations, barrios, ghettos, 'hoods, trailer parks and housing projects who are daily subjected to various forms of discrimination, racial profiling and police brutality, murder and mass imprisonment.

If the u.s. has no PPs, then apparently there's no MASS INJUSTICE in america because that's where MASS INCARCERATION and PPs come from. MASS INCARCERATION is the barometer, the main indicator of MASS INJUSTICE in society.

PPs are those in every land and thru out every era, who are imprisoned for fighting INJUSTICE in their societies and the same holds true today for the relationship between MASS INJUSTICE, MASS INCARCERATION and PPs in u.s. society - and who must be freed! Not only PPs - but ALL those imprisoned by unjust policies.

The latest 30-year prison-building/mass-incarceration spree has left the land dotted with thousands of new prisons overfilled with millions of prisoners - all of which has convinced state legislators that they cannot incarcerate their way out of the defects in this political system and that the current budget-busting levels of incarceration are too costly to sustain any longer.

So at this moment it seems very possible for social movements to succeed in reducing prison populations. But any reductions under the present policy would only postpone the next INCARCERATION binge to some more cost-efficient time in the future altho MASS INCARCERATION itself is the problem! Not crime, not drugs nor violent offenders per se, but MASS INCARCERATION itself is the problem. Crime rates, for serious crime, were as low in 2011 as they were in 1964. Rates for violent and nonviolent crimes have been declining for at least five years but the national prison population is

functionally the same size. So it's clear that incarceration rates are "policy" driven, not "crime" driven. And history shows that america's incarceration is driven primarily by "unjust racial/class" policies.

The 1st instance of america's unjust racial policy occurred at inception with its incipient genocide against Indigenous american, theft of their land and Chattel Slavery - unjust on its face - became racially so when it switched to enslaving Blacks ONLY. Confinement of Indigenous americans on reservations, their captured Chiefs and Braves in military prisons and the enslaved Afrikans on plantations for 300 years was the first MASS INCARCERATION committed by the colonial nation. Every slave confined on a plantation or runaway detained in jail was a POW. So was every Indigenous american forced onto reservations or detained in military prisons - as was any other person detained for resisting american genocide, enslavement, rape and robbery of their lands and nations.

The 2nd instance, which began at the end of the Civil War and continued until the 1970s, was the use of Black Codes and Jim Crow segregation laws to re-enslave the newly freed Blacks and people of color in general thru mass imprisonment in the penal system. At the time Whites were the overwhelming majority of the nation's prison population when the percentage of Blacks in the southern prisons jumped from near zero to 33% within 5 years. Others imprisoned during the ensuing 100 year struggle against Jim Crow segregation and other racial/class oppressions were the increasing number of poor immigrants and other such agricultural and industrial workers, union organizers, war resisters, ghetto heroin addicts and the rising number of Civil Rights workers and revolutionaries of all stripes: Black Panther Party, Puerto Rican Young Lords, Anti-imperialist Weather Underground Organization, Chicano Brown Berets, American Indian Movement, the Asian I WOR KUEN and numerous others which resulted in the defeat of Jim Crow (de jure) segregation during the mid-'60s. By 1975, Black and other people of color made up nearly half of the 250,000 prison population. The between 1865 and 1975 produced a great number of PP/POWs, including Big Bill Haywood, Sacco and Vanzetti, Sitting Bull, Marcus Garvey, and Pedro Albizo Campus; George Jackson, Angela Davis, Marilyn Buck, Huey P. Newton, Assata Shakur and many others.

And the 3rd instance of unjust racial/class policies began around 1975, a decade after the defeat of Jim Crow (legal, not actual) segregation. In that intervening period and beyond, numerous revolutionary organizations who were fighting injustice--the Black Liberation Army, FALN of Puerto Rico, American Indian Movement, Weather Underground Organization, the United Freedom Front, MOVE and others--were attacked by the police who killed or imprisoned several of their members. Those imprisoned joined the ranks of other unrecognized PP/POWs already in prison. Ronald Reagan set

widespread injustice in motion by flooding South Central L.A. with "crack" cocaine to secretly finance the Nicaraguan Contra War in the early 1980s, and incarceration rates skyrocketed. "Crack" spread quickly, devastated ghettos nationwide and escalated the racist hypocritical War on Drugs and racial profiling schemes that mainly targeted people of color, White hippies and the poor as crime suspects and targeted communities of color for saturation with Street Crime Units to terrorize, mass imprison and paint its inhabitants with felony convictions later used to deny their right to vote, deny their right to work jobs/trades requiring certain licenses and certificates, deny the right to live in public housing, deny food stamps, deny student loans for college/trade course etc., all of which relegated felons to a permanent 2nd-class status, exploded the prison population from 250,000 in the mid-'70s to 2.3 million today and so aptly verified noted author Michelle Alexander's statement that: "MASS INCARCERATION is the New Jim Crow." This era produced PP/POWs Oscar Lopez Rivera, Kwasi Balagoon, Mumia Abu Jamal, David Gilbert, Leonard Peltier, Move 9, Susan Rosenberg, Carlos Alberto Torres, Tom Manning, Jaan Laaman and numerous Muslim, Earth Liberation Front, Animal Liberation Front, Environmentalist and Occupy Wall Street PPs, plus Sekou Odinga and the liberation of Assata Shakur followed by her political asylum in Cuba. Blacks had become the absolute majority of the prison population at about 55% but the number is even higher since approximately 5 to 10% of the Black population is hidden in under the "Hispanic" ethnic category in the census, which often omit racial designations so that the "official" percentage of Black prisoners is listed at about 45% followed by a fast growing number of Browns: Latino/as, Hispanics, Indigenous Americans and Asians, with Whites declining to less than 20%.

Since America's MASS INCARCERATION is driven by unjust racial/class policies then the real solution to MASS INCARCERATION is MASS "DECARCERATION." In other words, drastic cuts to ALL prisoner's TIME, since TIME is the currency, the legal tender, the great equalizer and righter of wrongs in prison.

Many prison and human rights activists are in agreement with a position forwarded by Michelle Alexander, which calls for incarceration rates to be reset to 1980 levels, or even to the post-Jim Crow level of the 1970s, which are levels before Ronald Reagan flooded South Central and set off the "Crack" epidemic in America. Decarceration opens the door to struggle over the life and scope of the system more generally; it can be shrunk well beyond its earlier levels! To "DECARCERATE," many activists advocate some form of time-served plus prisoner-age combination that automatically put a prisoner out the door when the combination adds up to a certain number. The main proposal for this strategy, advocated by POWs like Russell Maroon Shoatz, calls for 25/50 and out: that is, if a prisoner is over 50

and has served 25 years or more, than s s/he is "automatically out the door" or discharged immediately. This strategy will free those imprisoned by, or long held for, biased and unjust policies - including many PPs as well.

Thank you for your attention - and i hope we can find ways to work together in support of PPs, prison struggles and progressive movements in both our countries. Our main PP organization is The Jericho Movement at nycjericho@gmail.com. Feel free to contact them on any issue regarding solidarity work for PPs in the u.s.

i also bring you solidarity greetings from those who have been on a rolling on hunger strike in the California state prisons. They're joined in a fierce struggle to end solitary confinement, some of whom have been held in solitary 20 years or more; 20 years in conditions described by their outside representative thusly:

"The long-term (indeed life long) indefinite isolated solitary confinement in 7' 7" x 11' 7" concrete boxes for 22 1/2 hours per day in California's Pelican Bay and Corcoran Secure Housing Units (SHUS) is torture. It is cruel. Without phone calls, without human touch, degrading and humiliating routines, bad food, insufficient clothing, no fresh air and they NEVER see natural sunlight, terrible mattresses... without hope of ever escaping, all this most often for reasons that have nothing to do with behavior, or even disciplinary matters. This is unprecedented in the history of the United States. Isolated for life for alleged associations, for what books you read, what art you draw or for what you believe in.... this is commonplace in the California system - a system which takes up more than half of California's budget."

They're also struggling against an insidious gang debriefing program that requires them to "give up" or "make up" info (i.e., "snitch") on another prisoner as their only ticket out of solitary. As expected, or designed, the program creates or greatly aggravates hostility between prison gang members and ethnic groups. In return the Hunger Strike leaders have initiated a Truce Movement among the various gangs and ethnic groups that's well worth your support and worth emulation by other states. To find out how you can support the California Prisons' Hunger Striker contact their outside representatives at:

Anne Weills and Carole Travis

Siegel and Yee

499 14th St. Suite 300

Oakland, CA 94612

and/or contact any of the following prisoner Hunger Strike leaders:

Todd Ashker, C58191, D1-119

Arturo Castellanos, C17275, D1-121

SitawaNantambuJamaa (Dewberry) C35761, D1-117

Antonio Guillen, P81948, D2-106

Paul Redd, B72683, D2-117

Pelican Bay mail to prisoners is addressed to:

P.O. Box 7500

Crescent City, CA 95532

Thank you.

In Struggle,

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