

Fight the Criminal Injustice System End California SHU brutality

The United States is world's leading prison-state per capita. The U.S. imprisons more Black people than did apartheid South Africa of the era before Mandela was president. The majority of prisoners are non-violent offenders and the U.S. Government now holds about a half million more prisoners than China; even though China is four times our population. In this so-called "free country" freedom is imprisonment.

Like the rest of the country, people from oppressed nations are imprisoned in California prisons at a disproportionate rate. In 1998 the CDC reported that 34% of the population in all CDC institutions was Latino, and 31% was Black. The population of the Security Housing Units (SHUs) is even more disproportionate. 82% of those in SHUs were non-white, and 52% of those in SHUs were Latino. This compares to a California population that was 32% Latino, and 7% Black in 1998.

The SHUs: Central to CDC repression

The five California SHU's - Pelican Bay State Prison SHU, Valley State Prison for Women SHU, California State Prison at Corcoran SHU, California Correctional Institution at Tehachapi SHU and Corcoran SATF - are the lynchpin for the CDC's prison system. They are the most brutal prisons in the system and principally target those prisoners who show the most resistance. They are designed to break inmates' spirit. The SHU is a threat which hangs over the head of all CA prisoners.

At Pelican Bay prisoners are kept in windowless cells for a minimum of 22 1/2 hours a day. There is no education, no job training, no work, no religious services, or hobby materials. Prisoners are subject to strip searches upon departure from and return to their cell when they have not come in contact with any other individual.

Conditions at Pelican Bay were found unconstitutional in 1995 by a federal court, which ruled that prisoners were subjected to gratuitous and racist beatings and that medical facilities were inadequate. Prisoners report that little has changed since this ruling. Corcoran prison is infamous for its daily "gladiator fights," staged between 1988 and 1996. Guards would manipulate exercise schedules so that known enemies would be in the handball-court-sized recreation area at the same time. Fights were basically certain, and guards bet on the outcome. After a fight had gone on for a while, guards would break it up by firing wooden bullets at the prisoners. Hundreds of prisoners were injured in these fights - including seven murdered by guards. These are only a few of the tortures and terrors implemented by the CDC.

Transfer to and from a SHU depends on the whims of a classification committee. Prisoners are not allowed legal counsel before this kangaroo court. The CDC claims that the SHUs house "the worst of the worst," who are kept in lockdown because they pose a danger to other prisoners. However - as is the case in other control units throughout the U.S. - many of the prisoners in California's SHUs are there because they are jailhouse lawyers, or have filed too many grievances.

The CDC also uses the policy of "snitch, parole, or die" to justify further repression and turn prisoners against each other. Prisoners can be transferred to the SHU - regardless of good behavior or their sentence - if "confidential informants" label them gang members. Prisoners are not allowed to confront their accusers or defend against the allegation of gang membership, so many of those sent to the SHU under this policy may indeed be innocent of the so-called crime of gang membership. Once in the SHU, these prisoners can only leave if they inform on another "gang member," are paroled, or die. This is clearly a policy aimed at creating a need for SHU space and fanning the flames of the anti-gang (read: anti-oppressed nation youth) hysteria. This CDC policy violates the international bourgeoisie's own standards for fair treatment of prisoners.

Other CDC policies regulating even the most mundane aspects of prisoners' lives are designed to provoke prisoners and pave the way for further prisons expansion and crackdowns. Since the end of 1997, the CDC has (a) prohibited long hair and beards among male prisoners - some of whom wear their hair long for religious reasons, (b) taken away the \$1 million budget for the prison law library, and (c) taken away prisoners' weights, restricting their already limited recreation and increasing hazards to their physical health.

As history teaches us, "oppression breeds resistance." In one example, on New Year's Day 1998 over 1,000 prisoners in Folsom State prison rebelled by throwing burning toilet paper over the tiers, banging on cell doors, and refusing to eat. In the words of a San Quentin prisoner, "We do have a little bit of life in here, debased as it is, but there's stuff to do. [The grooming restrictions are] just too much." On October 19 this year prisoners in the Corcoran SHU restarted a hunger strike to protest the brutal conditions. We have a responsibility on the outside and expose and fight the criminal injustice system.

Join the California Books for Prisoners organizing group: Work directly with prisoners in California corresponding, educating, learning, fighting repression, and building a movement both behind the bars and on the outside. Our Books for Prisoners program offers free political literature as a part of our work with prisoners to organize against the Criminal Injustice System. Join the Maoist Internationalist Movement and the Revolutionary Anti-Imperialist League in the fight against the Criminal Injustice System in California and across the United States.

**For more information contact us at mim124@mim.org
<http://www.etext.org/Politics/MIM>**

A HISTORY OF AMERIKKKA'S OPPRESSIVE CONTROL UNITS

by an Iowa Prisoner, Oct. 18, 1995 (reprinted from MIM Notes)

In the late 18th century, the Walnut Street Prison in Philadelphia, PA, became the first penitentiary in U.S. history to experiment with the use of long-term isolation. This was based on the "Quaker theory" that without social interaction, a prisoner could not be influenced by fellow inmates and that a religious conversion would occur during the years of enforced meditation and result in the individual's reformation. This theory had monstrous effects upon those incarcerated between its walls. Some fell into a condition from which it was almost impossible to arouse them. Others became violently insane, some to the extreme of committing suicide. Those who underwent these isolating conditions were generally not reformed. In most cases individuals did not recover sufficient mental activity to be of any service to the community. It would seem that after such experimentation, that this type of treatment would be eliminated by prisoncrats. Instead the practice of confining prisoners to small cells for long periods of time is still in full force.

In modern times the U.S. penitentiary at Alcatraz became notorious for holding the most dangerous criminals within the U.S. penal system. In reality it became the first "control unit prison" used as a mechanism to enforce control over prisoners and society. More recently the super-max penitentiary in Marion, Illinois became the new "End of the line" for both state and federal prisoners who prisoncrats considered to be "institutional problems" or "too dangerous" to be housed in any other institution. Because of appalling conditions in October, 1983, a riot broke out and two guards were killed. This gave the prisoncrats the excuse to lock down the entire prison population. This meant that prisoners were confined to their cells for 23 and a half hours a day and all visits were suspended. Until a court order was enforced, even attorneys were denied access to the prison. Eventually the lockdown eased in some areas, but stringent and restrictive policies remained largely in effect. Months after the riot an emerging pattern of brutal repression against the 350 inmates became apparent. 60 additional guards were brought in from other parts of the federal prison system to systematically beat and brutalize scores of prisoners.

The idea of Marionization spread rapidly throughout the Amerikkkan prison system because prison officials cried that their institutions were unsafe and control over the convict in every way possible was desperately needed. The truth behind the reasons these control units are needed is they are a means of political, economic and social control of a whole class of oppressed and disenfranchised people. These include especially African, Latino and indigenous people who are a disproportionate part of control unit populations.

These torture units go beyond the usual constraints of maximum security prisons. Better defined as a prison within a prison, these control units are used to defeat prisoners' revolutionary attitudes, organization, militancy, legal and administrative challenges; and anything else the prison administrators deem objectionable. These control units have various names such as: Adjustment center, security housing unit (SHU), maximum control complex (MCC), administrative maximum (ad-max), intensive management unit, and administrative segregation (ad-seg). Every prison possesses the label control unit status if long-term punishment and/or isolation are used.

While conditions vary from prison to prison, the goal of these units is always to achieve the spiritual, psychological and physical breakdown of the prisoner. Once prisoners are confined to a control unit, gross human rights violations take place on a daily basis. With minor differences, these control units share the following features: Prisoners spend years of isolation in tiny cells, usually 6 by 8 feet for 22-23.5 hours a day. The short time that they do spend outside their cell within a cement or chain link "dog pen" that lacks any kind of equipment and proper space to for physical exercise. Participation in programs including religious services, educational/work/job training, congregate dining and exercise are strongly prohibited by the administration. Also greatly limited is access to medical and psychiatric care.

The most damaging aspect of control units is the physical and mental torture that is imposed upon their victims. First the methods of how physical torture is inflicted: Forced cell extractions by militarily attired, baton-wielding guards are constantly used without cause or warning. These guards violently beat, choke, and kick already-shackled prisoners. Sometimes these cell extractions are so abusive that prisoners require extensive medical attention. Devices such as tazer guns, pepper spray, maces and manacles are used and four-point restraints and hog-tying are routinely overused, despite the fact that such instruments have caused bodily harm and death.

Another cruel practice is "caging". This is where scantily clad or naked prisoners are held in outdoor cages for hours in cold and rainy weather. The systematic use of firehosing shackled prisoners while in their cells, with high-pressure cold water, then leaving standing water in the cell, usually accompanies a prisoner being put in "strip cell status." While frigid temperatures make it impossible to sleep or even lay down, a bright light shines upon the cell 24 hours a day.

For those who can endure the physical cruelty, the mental torture can surely affect one's sanity. One example of this is sensory deprivation. This is when the prisoncrats forbid prisoners to have books, televisions, radios and contact visits, including those with lawyers. In some control units it is impossible for prisoners to communicate amongst themselves. Verbal harassment containing derogatory or racial statements are made by the guards. Mail is misplaced, delayed, destroyed or censored. Threats are made against family and visitors. The passing of false confidential information to foster paranoia and fights between convicts is utilized to weaken any unionization between prisoners. Legal access is another area that is greatly violated. This includes the censoring of lawyer and court mail, guards monitoring attorney-client phone and visit conversations, and the hindering of access to legal books and materials.

Control Units are designed to administer the very most in sensory deprivation and dehumanization of inmates. Currently Iowa is building a control unit and this writer faces the possibility of being transferred because of my political and rebellious attitude toward the capitalist system. Essentially control units serve only one purpose, and that is to control society. All control units must be abolished, and the victims of these dungeons treated as survivors of torture.