

# Shut down the Security Housing Units (SHU)

The five official 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.

In the Security Housing Units prisoners spend years of isolation in tiny cells, usually 6 by 8 feet for 22 - 23.5 hours a day. In some cases the long term isolation is complete, in others it is small group isolation; both conditions are tremendously damaging to humans. The short time that they do spend outside their cell is within a cement or chain link "dog pen" that lacks any kind of equipment and proper space for physical exercise. Participation in programs including religious services, educational programs, work and job training, congregate dining and exercise are all prohibited. Medical care is also greatly limited.

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, and now even the mainstream press, 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.

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.

In California, and across the country, Security Housing Units principally target oppressed nations. In 1998 the California Department of Corrections (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 people 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 population appears to be about the same today but exact statistics are not published by the CDC for the public.

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 October 2002 prisoners in the Corcoran SHU waged a hunger strike to protest the brutal conditions. Resistance behind the bars continues and we have a responsibility on the outside to support these struggles.

Join us the first Saturday of every month to protest the SHU brutality. Contact us for more information:

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On the web: <http://www.etext.org/Politics/MIM/agitation/prisons>