

ESSAY – STILL in Solidarity from Solitary

May 2019

Greetings Comrades,

With another year for us to stand in solidarity during the upcoming national prisoner strike, I am often asked why I continue to participate. What does it all mean anyways? Does it really make a difference one way or the other? The short answer is YES... it does. However, with decades of practice, the United States Criminal “Injustice” System is very skilled at frustrating people in order to weaken movements toward justice, progress, and revolution, so I would like to give my personal loooooong answer to that. I’ll even include the ten demands of WHY we strike, for extra credit.

You see, I first started learning about the struggles of being oppressed through my mom who single-handedly raised me and my siblings in a low income household... when we did have a house, that is. We were homeless a number of times, and the “system” did not provide any positive alternatives for us. Instead, all the so-called programs they provided were designed to keep us dependent on them and to keep us stuck in the revolving door of helplessness. I learned early that we were living in a broken system, so when I unfortunately graduated from “elementary-to-the-penitentiary,” I quickly realized that prison was an extension of that system... A revolving door of recidivism. I’ve always had a natural tendency to stand up for the downtrodden, so when I witnessed firsthand the oppression that goes on inside the Prison Industrial Complex (*P.I.C*), I knew I had to help bring some awareness and thus joined the National Prisoner Strike Movement. Not to mention the Incarcerated Workers Organizing Committee (*IWOC*), and the Fight Toxic Prison (*FTP*) Collective. Despite my peaceful involvement with the strike last year, I was placed on Close Management Solitary for 18 months (*for writing an email nonetheless*), but even so, I have come far in my journey of self-development and social awareness. I continue to educate myself, network, and strategize plans for the future, so that I can one day greatly assist in positive efforts towards prison reform with free world people. For now, the wonderful outside support I’ve gained has inspired me to humbly enlighten my brothers on the inside. After all, constant exposure to the realities of oppression is what leads people... inside and out... to make the struggle their own.

On the downside, while most people understand and can comprehend the very conditions of oppression, they still will show no signs of resistance to the ill forces of the oppressor. Peaceful or otherwise. “What difference will it make?” is the common sentiment. In prison, for example, it will literally be a few of us who will stand up to injustices or an officer/staff who blatantly disrespect/mistreat an inmate. On one hand, we are doing the whole prison population a service by defending another inmate and not letting ruthless, repressive guards get away with anything. Even at a cost of retaliation. On the other hand, we could be enabling “inmates” inactions, while the real “convicts” do the dirty work. You could almost hear them think aloud: “hard work never killed anybody, but why take the chance?” All jokes aside, it is peculiar to me that most times the brother that is being disrespected/mistreated by staff will not stand up for himself, but will not hesitate to bust another inmate if he even looks at him wrong. Convicts stick together, but when like-minded folks like myself try to bring a little awareness to such inmates, they become negative and close-minded. Some may even become argumentative, and want to express their viewpoint aggressively, to appear like they know what is correct.

To that my comrades, I say this. There are those in this instance, who may feel inadequate in certain areas of solidarity, so approaching them from angles of particular interest is something to think about. One major thing I would adapt about the approach would be to see these brothers as friends, rather than adversaries. It's imperative that we meet people where they are in their level of concern & strive to find common ground. We have no interest in enlightening those folks who have no opposition, and we certainly can't believe that people who are uneducated about the inner workings of the P.I.C. know absolutely nothing. They might not be educated by bourgeois institutions or even in political philosophy or history (*Just saw a politician trying to save both faces*), but imprisoned masses have a lifetime of experience in living oppressed under a corrupt system that governs by dictatorial power and forcible suppression of opposition. I know I have. Rather than knocking people down to be receptive to our struggle, let's help open people up to it and go down this road together. Through this tactic, we may very well pique their interest in a profound way. It may even help them become positive and open minded about revolutionary change. This is the greater reality for us who do not fear the repercussions of being a part of the National Prisoner Strike, because we believe prison reform and ultimately a society without mass incarceration... is possible. That's the long answer. I once joined a self-help group for people who talked too much... it was called 'On and On Anon!' LOL. In closing and in most seriousness, here are ten reasons why we strike...

- 1) Immediate improvements to the conditions of prisons and prison policies that will recognize the humanity of imprisoned men, women, and the LGBTQ community.
- 2) An immediate end to prison slavery under the 13th amendment. All persons imprisoned in any place of detention under United States Jurisdiction must be paid the prevailing wage in their state or territory for their labor.
- 3) The Prison Litigation Reform Act must be rescinded, allowing imprisoned humans a proper channel to address grievances and violations of their rights.
- 4) The Truth in Sentencing Act and the Sentencing Reform Act must be rescinded so that imprisoned humans have a possibility of rehabilitation and parole. No human shall be sentenced to death-by-incarceration or serve any sentence without the possibility of parole.
- 5) An immediate end to the racial over-charging, over-sentencing, and parole denials of black and brown humans. Black humans shall no longer be denied parole because the victim of the crime was white, which is a particular problem in southern states.
- 6) An immediate end to racist gang enhancement laws targeting black and brown humans.
- 7) No imprisoned human shall be denied access to rehabilitation programs at their place of detention because of their label as a violent offender.
- 8) State prisons must be funded specifically to offer more rehabilitation services.
- 9) Pell Grants in prisons must be reinstated in all U.S. states and territories.
- 10) The voting rights of all confined citizens serving prison sentences, pre-trial detainees, and so-called "ex-felons" must be counted. Representation is demanded. All voices count.

"Still" in solidarity from solitary,

Ezzial Williams #228036
Suwannee Correctional Institution
5964 U.S. Hwy 90
Live Oak, FL 32060