

Coalition For Prisoners' Rights Newsletter

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ON THE CHEAP: How to Measure Success

The prison system in this country is the story of What is Wrong. And the answers are endless. Here is another one: An outfit called the Death Penalty Information Center (DPIC: 1015 18th St NW, Suite 704, Washington DC 20036, 202-289-2275, www.deathpenaltyinfo.org) has come out with a report pushing the sentence of Life Without the Possibility of Parole (LWOP) because it is less expensive than an execution sentence.

DPIC offers absolutely no evidence that in any other way it is "better." This is the kind of short-term thinking that has resulted in the U.S. police, court, and prison system--in this country with 5% of the world's population--being responsible for creating 25% of the world's prisoners.

There is no evidence that LWOP promotes community safety; or the prevention of violence, or community healing or protection for those falsely accused and convicted. Nor the opportunity for those serving such sentences to make any positive contribution to the community.

LWOP--including LWOP for those who were juveniles at the time the crime they are convicted of was committed--is, in fact, a death penalty sentence.

And the DPIC does point out: "The death penalty [execution] without execution is a very expensive form of life without parole." And that police chiefs agree that the death penalty [execution] does not work as a deterrent. And that 68% of execution sentences are reversed at some point in the appeals process--when these cases are retried without the "defect" that led to the reversal, 82% result in a sentence of life or less. Inadequacy of the trial lawyer is the most common "defect." DPIC's careful estimate of the cost of each execution is \$25 million. And what do we get for that? Legalized torture and racism. Just like we do for LWOP sentences.

The DPIC rightly states: "Justice can be achieved far more reliably and equitably without the death penalty [either execution or Life Without]. The promised benefits from the death penalty

[execution or Life Without] have not materialized." Indeed. [Our additions.]

Just because a change is popular and promised as a quick fix to increasingly discredited practice does not mean that it will be an improvement. The growing adoption of Life Without sentences simply creates a new, less visible, problem.

There is no shortage of how to make things worse. Another example is Arizona's deciding to contract with for-profit private companies to run 9 of the state's 10 prison complexes (with approximately 40,000 prisoners), including the state's Death Row, which currently houses 127 people. Executions would still be performed by the state, but pay the for-profit company a per-diem fee for each prisoner.

If and when this happens, Arizona would be the first state to put virtually its entire prison system under for-profit, private control. The little piece of reality that Arizona is apparently thinking about is saving \$100 million (out of a \$2 billion budget shortfall). The state also wants to contract out prisoners' medical care to for profit companies.

This is despite the fact that contracting with for-profit prison companies has not resulted in promised (and apparently believed in) cost savings from such privatizations. In addition, prison guards unions have resisted such privatizations. For-profit companies do not generally provide the same wages or benefits as states. "High-profile problems" such as uprisings, escapes and other violence in privately run facilities have drawn unwanted publicity. Not to mention deaths of both prisoners and guards.

There are, of course, many other ways to reduce prison-related expenses, that are both more certain, more saving and more humane. Many states have made changes that have enabled them to close prisons, including changes in sentencing laws, policies, and practice which reduce prison populations.

CRIME OF THE MONTH aka Crimetoppers

What the heck is Israel's water doing under Palestinian soil? It sure is a lucky coincidence that Israel's illegal settlements, built in violation of International law and the Geneva Conventions, just happen to give Israel control of most of the water in the West Bank. Otherwise, who knows, everyone living in that region might be allowed to share equally in this precious resource. As it is, the Palestinians are allocated an average of 70 liters of water per person per day, compared to 300 liters per day for Israelis. Thank goodness. We wouldn't want to see them have to limit their number of swimming pools just so Palestinians can have enough water to drink.

Let's hope the usual good neighbor policy on the part of Israel continues in the form of the denial of permits to Palestinians to drill wells, the destruction of Palestinian water infrastructure, and the poisoning of Palestinian wells by Jewish occupiers. It's especially encouraging to know that Israeli soldiers make a habit of destroying rainwater harvesting cisterns which the Palestinians build.

How else can Israel remain secure if not by denying water to the Palestinians? Besides, Israel is granting the Palestinians more water than it was "required to" under the Oslo Accords. It just happens to be only one-quarter as much as it grants to itself.

Our Crime of the Month is the continued collective punishment being imposed on Palestinians. Maybe we should award Israel a Peace Prize for their actions.

This 2 page version of the CPR monthly newsletter will be included in all correspondence we send out. Others who would like to receive it must send us a stamped, self-addressed envelope (up to 12 at one time) for every issue they would like to receive. We still plan to send out our yearly holiday card/calendar to our updated, but not expended, mailing list.

Many thanks to the Real Cost of Prisons Project for making the newsletter available on-line at: <http://www.realcostofprisons.org/coalition.html> Download it & mail it in!

We know of many hundreds of letters that have gone to Oprah (Harpo Productions, 1058 W Washington Blvd, Chicago IL 60607) without any response from her. Since Martha Stewart has had a taste of the judicial system, also write her at: 11 W 42nd St, New York NY 10036.

Concierto en Cuba

Juanes ha tocado un concierto multitudinario por la paz en La Habana. El músico colombiano se trataba de fomentar la tolerancia y unir pueblos a través de la música. El concierto "Paz sin fronteras" de Juanes, ha generado airadas críticas por parte del algunos exiliados cubanos en Miami.

"Cuando veo lo que nos has ocurrido por tan sólo querer ir a Cuba...Es una locura, quiero decir, entiendo el dolor, entiendo la historia de los cubanos, lo entiendo todo pero estoy preguntando por el futuro, por la gente joven en Cuba."

El gobierno cubano lamentó los ataques sufridos por Juanes y aseguró continúan los preparativos del concierto en la isla.

Precisamente Juanes señaló que la controversia es parte del diálogo hacia algo positivo. "En todas las reacciones, en todas las cosas que han pasado en este concierto está la respuesta. Si se hiciera un concierto por la paz y nada pasara...es que es eso. Se trata de eso. De ir con la música y tocar en lugares donde normalmente no se puede hacer."

Juanes también ha recibido un abrumador apoyo por parte de ciertos miembros de la comunidad cubana en Estados Unidos, además de cantantes y políticos. El gobernador de Nuevo México describió el concierto como algo positivo.

En marzo del año pasado, Juanes organizó un concierto en la frontera colombo-venezolana en pro de una resolución pacífica a una crisis diplomática surgida unos días antes.

New Mexico, like a number of other states, is considering releasing prisoners as a way of making up its budget deficit. The NM-DOC says it would have to close two prisons, including the for-profit women's prison. Some people would be moved and others--660 total--released. The state senate president said that closing prisons would be "really hard" on the small communities they're in. Harder than on those who have been imprisoned in them?

VOICES FROM INSIDE

Cranston RI October 15, 2009

The socially conscious pamphlet Con*mic City brings together information, art and commentary from incarcerated men. Steven Parkhurst, 92047, Medium 1 Security, PO Box 8274, Cranston RI 02920.

Los Angeles CA Fall 2009
Action Committee for Women in Prison * CA Coalition for Women in Prison * Families to Amend CA's 3 Strikes * Youth Justice Coalition--are working to abolish juvenile life and JLWOP: c/o Lifers/FACTS, 3982 S Figueroa St #210, Los Angeles CA 90037.