

## ENEMY OF THE STATE

In order to find remedies to California's economic crisis the State Government has undertaken the tumultuous task of scrutinizing the spending practices of every public institution. Excessive spending in non-essential expenditures could be probable cause to either downsize a particular entity or terminate it altogether. Public entities such as schools, social programs i.e. welfare, SSI, Medi-Cal, law enforcement, prisons, etc. are being subjected to intense pressure from the State Legislature, Federal Government, and Federal and State Courts to eliminate frivolous spending from their respective budgets or risk losing funding thereby leading to termination.

There is an altogether different approach being taken in regards to the Department of Corrections whose spending and costs comprises nearly 20% of the State's budget. Because so much money every year is being used by the CDCR (California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation) the state has begun to examine the fundamental structure of the Department, and how changes in this structure could aid the state's crisis in general. Primarily, this focus shifts directly to the biggest drain on the Department and State respectively: California's massive prison guards' union known as the California Correctional Peace Officers Association (CCPOA).

The CCPOA has under its umbrella of protection nearly 30,000 prison guards/officials in California. An entry level position for a correctional officer is in the ballpark of \$70,000 a year, compare that to the average salary paid to public school teachers and you can see where the State's priorities lie. Although the Governor has disallowed the working of overtime by state employees many, or should I say most, prison guards work overtime on a weekly basis, sometimes in successive days, accumulating time and a half and double time pay.

Not unlike any other enterprise in this society the union's economic wealth has translated into political clout. The CCPOA is by far the state's largest and most influential lobby. They **have** and continue to endorse California's three-strikes law, Marsy's Law, subsidizing for the building of more prisons, and other measures that have diverted funds away from community building projects. All of these measures have helped California become the nation's leader in locking people up with 34 prisons and a population that is nearing 200,000 inmates. These staggering numbers have provided the CCPOA with the leverage to affect not only prisons and prisoners but the local communities as well.

Recently the union has hit a "bump in the road". Governor Schwarzenegger has been shifting his affection towards what appears to be a more lucrative entity in the Correctional Corporations of America (CCA); the nation's largest privately ran prison company. What makes these private prisons so attractive is their cost effectiveness. For the amount of money it costs to house one prisoner in the CDCR it costs half the amount with private prisons. The difference between the two is in the amount of wages paid to prison guards. Guards at the privately ran facilities are paid substantially less money and, as evidenced by the outrageous amount of lawsuits filed against California guards along with their misconduct and a t times criminal behavior, just as efficient

as their unionized counterparts. What is exactly the argument that the CCPOA is presenting in order to justify their high price and strain on California's economy?

The CCPOA is arguing the fact that they are a "professional" corrections union. Their case is based on a depiction of prisoners as violent, unmanageable, and unwilling to rehabilitate. For this reason only officers that are trained to deal with such elements should be employed; ironically the CCPOA acts as if they have a monopoly on such training. However, is this really the case or is it another propaganda spin by a union that is struggling to prove its value and worth to the people of California?

I have a unique perspective to offer the general public, one that is not readily accessible to them. I am inside these prison walls so I see the day-to-day operations of a morally deficient and mentally incompetent prison system without the synthetic additives normally given to the public. The fact is the mentality of prisoners is changing; more are becoming aware of their responsibilities to themselves, loved ones, and communities. Over half of the prison population in California are known as "programmers", meaning they are denouncing their violent, gangster lifestyles and seeking alternative solutions to their problems. Lifers are focused on gaining paroles and those with release dates are trying to acquire the skills necessary to survive and thrive in greater society. Long gone are the days of magnified and glamorized prison violence; the mentality is now one of freedom of mind, body, and soul.

This progress is more or less in desire, as this path has been impeded. In an effort to cut spending, thus, strengthening its case to the legislature, the Department has eliminated most education, vocation, and self-help programs; in short, anything that is conducive to nurturing the desire to change is being eliminated.

Over half the prison population at the prison I am currently housed is idle, doing absolutely nothing to better themselves. Even visiting has been reduced significantly despite rules and regulations prohibiting such action. Prisons officials are even disregarding California's Penal Code. In regards to the visiting Penal Code §6350 state that inmate visiting & family ties is conducive to reducing recidivism, prison violence, and is essential towards attaining proper rehabilitation. This brazen attitude by prison officials towards rehabilitation is having an adverse effect on today's inmates who will become tomorrow's citizens. This begs the question: when this lack of attention manifests itself into a wave of parolees living within society with nothing to offer, who will foot the bill?

The events taking place today is generally geared toward re-creating an atmosphere of "gangsterism" in order to re-ignite flames of violence to demonstrate that such a "professional" organization such as the CCPOA is needed to handle these so-called "threats" to public safety. If this is proven the union will have succeeded again in duping the legislature, courts, and general public into justifying taking funds from schools, social programs, health care, and other such preventative measures against penal institutions. Prison should be the last resort and we must treat them as such. When millions of dollars are diverted from children's education and instead placed in the pockets of the greedy parasites

at the CCPOA who are harboring criminals with a badge, the only loser is society itself. Our future is with the children, who are our leaders of tomorrow, not a criminal organization that publicly promotes themselves as protectors of society while at the same time exacerbating crime, violence, and other acts contrary to a progressive and just society.

We need people who are not afraid of the bully tactics used by such organization to stand up and speak out against immorality and criminality, especially when it is committed by public officials. Our primary focus should be on providing the youth with the resources needed to be productive members of society before they fall victim to the injustice system, the prison system, and the thugs who run them. We must sacrifice ourselves for the sake of the whole even if it means facing reprisals for our actions. Writings such as this could warrant retaliation and silencing by prison officials who despise truth and covet their own fortunes, yet, despite these threats I quote U.S. Supreme Court Justice Thurgood Marshall when he said: "The mails are one of the few vehicles prisoners have for informing the community about their existence and, in these days of strife in our correctional institutions, the plight of prisoners is a matter of urgent public concern." [Procunier v. Martinez, 94 S.Ct. 1816 (1974)]. Those words are as true today as they were then. POWER through KNOWLEDGE; FREEDOM through SACRIFICE.