

# KEEP THE FIRES BURNING

A PUBLICATION BY AND FOR CALIFORNIA PRISONERS

## On Unity

By *Chican@Power*

25 February 2019

Revolutionary Greetings!

I just received my first issue of Keep The Fires Burning Issue 3 Winter 2019, and I'm glad to see another revolutionary-minded publication has been created for the political consumption of prisoners. While there already exists other prisoner newsletters claiming to speak or represent the prison movement, too many of them unfortunately focus too narrowly on their own dogmatic interpretation of what a prison movement should be, which is why I believe it's important for prisoners representing a plethora of political views and beliefs to have a common platform where they can gather to discuss what they believe to be the most important issues arising out of, surrounding, and concerning the revolutionary prison movement; a movement comprising potentially thousands of forward-looking individuals and organizations. Whether these individuals are revolutionary nationalist, queer revolutionaries, communist or anarchist should not be the focus. What should, however, is that they all strive towards a common goal according to an agreed-upon set of guidelines and principles based on mutual respect. Perhaps Keep The Fires Burning can be that platform?

I'm also glad to see the IWOC has decided to include submissions from prisoners on Sensitive Needs Yards (SNY) as some prisoner-centered publications refuse to even mail a subscription to prisoners on SNYs, let alone print their submissions. Unfortunately this is due to the opportunist politics of said publishers who have seemingly adopted the politics of some anti-people prison organizations they work with to the detriment of the very same cause they claim to uphold and represent. That said, it is not my intention to stir up a hornets' nest of divisiveness and debate with my words. Rather, the intent is to draw attention to the contradiction of General Population (GP) versus SNY and the need for prisoners on both side of the fence to open up a dialogue for the purpose of a strategic build geared to a resolution of this contradiction on the basis of peace and cooperation.

It is ridiculous to continue letting outdated, reactionary prison ideology stemming from the glamorization of criminality, drugs, violence, and money lead us astray of our true historical mission. To continue talking of a united front against our common oppression – all the while, excluding a significant portion of the population, is idealist at best and a betrayal to the cause of progress and revolution. Indeed, for those claiming the mantle of “revolutionary” have a greater responsibility, as they cannot content themselves with merely philosophizing about the world, and reliving their past glory. The point is to change it! The reality of today's California prison system demands this of us.

To give a brief example of what I'm talking about, one need only look to the experiment of Non-Designated Programming Facilities (NDPF) to understand that we either resolve these contradictions ourselves or have the state resolve them for us.

That said, I know space is limited here so I'll end this with a shout-out to Rosie the Rebel, whose article *Trans Resistance in California Prisons: A Brief Chronology* was not only informative but addressed the topic of reformism versus revolutionary politics in First World organizations. As such, I would highly encourage prison activists on both sides of the fence (and both sides of the wall) to interrogate the politics of their own organizations and movements to understand what side of the contradiction they fall under. Revolution in society means a fundamental shift in the balance of politics and economics as well as in the way people relate to each other. Reformism on the other hand simply entails an equalization of power and privilege in society, all the while leaving the rest of society intact.

## On Chasing Paper

**Still we lampin' still clockin' dirt for our sweat**

**A ballot's dead so a bullet's what I get**

**A thousand years you had the tools, we should be takin' 'em**

**Fuck the G-ride, I want the machines that are makin' 'em...**

*- from "Down Rodeo" on the CD 'Evil Empire' Rage Against the Machine*

Chasing paper. Many of us who are locked up were chasing paper, and we chased it right through the prison gates and into the cells we now occupy.

We use our time in lock up to scheme and dream and come up with new strategies for chasing paper. We get money tattooed all over us. We listen to songs that will motivate us. We develop our visions. We identify our competition. We build our networks, our empires.

Maybe we don't think about how we are plotting and sweating and bleeding to get portraits of the faces of former slave-owners, plantation masters who got rich by taking hostages and exploiting them for their sweat and blood. We don't stop to think that those dead slave owners continue to take us hostage--in a new way--and trick us into chasing them, collecting them, worshipping them.

If we stopped to think about it, to really think about it, we'd ask ourselves why we value the money that someone else prints. We'd wonder why we let them print it and distribute it and decide who gets more and who gets less. Why aren't we printing the money? Instead, we get tricked. We spend our lives and blood and sweat chasing paper and serving the system, the scheme of those who put the paper out.

How many of us catch it? And for how long?

if we stopped to think about it, we'd see that we really don't want their paper. What we want is the happiness and freedom that we see others have, others who have paper. We want nice things. A good house, a new car, the best clothes, great food, comfort. We want friends and loved ones who love and respect us. We want lives of purpose and meaning and importance.

What if I told you that we could all have that, if only we were the ones with the power to print the paper... and to get that power, we must take it from the ones who currently have it?

The ones who turn some of us against the rest, so we kill each other and save them time and bullets...

The ones who decide where the factories and jobs go...

The ones with the planes bringing the drugs into the country...

The ones who hand out the sentences...

The ones who count the votes.

They run things. They run us. They are our enemies, with happiness and freedom at our expense... living off our sweat and blood. They're not special or smart or more deserving than we are, and we can be just as happy and just as free as they are, if only we spend our sweat and blood chasing revolution like we've spent it chasing paper.

There's only one thing that they have that you don't: they know a powerful secret.

And now you know it too.

*-Anarchist Prisoner S. S.*

# Alien Conquest

By John Q. Convict

HELLO HUMANS, I BELONG TO THE ALIEN RACE THAT HAS BEEN STUDYING YOUR CIVILIZATION FOR SEVERAL OF YOUR DECADES IN ORDER TO SUCCESSFULLY CONQUER AND SUBJUGATE YOU FOR EXPLOITATION. WE HAVE DETERMINED THAT HUMANS ARE FOR THE MOST PART, TOO APHASIC TO RECOGNIZE WHAT YOUR OWN HISTORY TEACHES YOU. MOST OF YOU TYPICALLY LABEL YOURSELVES SO AS TO SIGNIFY A PREDILECTION FOR DISPARITY, YOU ABHOR UNIFICATION IF IT MEANS THAT YOU ARE NOT ABLE TO ESPOUSE HOW BETTER YOU ARE THAN THE NEXT HUMAN.

WE STUDIED YOUR MUSIC AND FIND THAT EVEN THAT DURING THE SIXTIES GROUPS LIKE THE TEMPTATIONS PUT OUT A VERY POPULAR SONG CALLED "SAY IT LOUD" OR "I'M BLACK AND I'M PROUD" IN WHICH THE DARKER COMPLEXIONED HUMANS HAD TO RESORT TO CONVEYING THE OBVIOUS ANALOGOUS UNIFORMITY OF BASIC CHARACTERISTICS ARE UNEQUIVOCALLY PALPABLE. HOW DID IT GO, AH YES "LOOK IN THE MIRROR, AND WHAT DO YOU SEE, TWO EYES A NOSE AND A MOUTH JUST LIKE ME!" YET YOU HUMANS STILL JUST DON'T GET IT AND CONTINUE TO DENIGRATE AND MALIGN EACH OTHER AS A BRANCH OF THE SAME HUMAN SPECIES.

IN YOUR NEWS MEDIA WE HAVE NOTED THAT THE TERM "RACE" AND "RACE RELATIONS," "RACISM" ARE HIGHLY POLITICIZED TERMS IN VIEW OF THE VERITY THAT ITS USED TO STIGMATIZE EVEN IN ITS DEFINITIONS OF, FOR INSTANCE A CONTEST OF FOR INSTANCE SPEED OR TO EXPOUSE A FORM OF SUPERIORITY OF ONE OVER ANOTHER. ON THE OTHER HAND ITS USED TO DENOTE A GROUP OF PEOPLE WHO BASED ON THE FOUR CONCEPTUAL IDEAS OF MONOTHEISM DESCEND FROM ADAM AND EVE, OR FOR THOSE WHO DO NOT BELIEVE IN THE EXISTENCE OF A SUPREME BEING AS THE CREATOR, WE CAN STILL LOOK TO SCIENCE AND THE EXISTENCE OF THE MC-235 GENETIC MARKER IN ALL HUMANITY WHICH ALSO BASED UPON GENETIC ORIGINATED IN THE OULDIVAL GORGE REGION OF THE AFRICAN CONTINENT.

THUS ITS QUTE FATUOUS TO TRADUCE ANY PORTION OF THE HUMAN FAMILY. THE REALITY IS THAT ANYONE WHO HARBORS A SUPREMACIST IDEOLOGY AND DENOUNCES THEIR BROTHERS AND SISTERS IS DENIGRATING SELF AND THIS FOR THE MOST PART IS THE RESULT OF GEOGRAPHICAL ECONOMICS.

TO PROVIDE A COMPARISON LET'S TAKE A LOOK AT A SMALL SOUTH PACIFIC ISLAND OF THE SOUTH AMERICAN CONTINENT. ON THIS ISLAND YOU WILL FIND A LIZARD THAT IS BROWN IN COLOR LIVING AND BREEDING ON THE ISLAND. THEN THERE IS A LIZARD THAT FROM DIRECT OBSERVATION IS NOT ANY DIFFERENT THAN THE BROWN LIZARD EXCEPT IT'S GREEN! HOWEVER THIS VERSION OF THE SAME LIZARD GATHERS IT SUSTENANCE OUT OF THE SEA! THESE LIZARDS COULD, IF THEY CHOSE TO, MATE NATURALLY, SOME OF THE PROGENY WILL HAVE THE TRAITS OF BOTH PARENTS DISTINCTLY OR IN A COMBINED FORM. YET THEY ARE STILL THE SAME SPECIES, ONE HAS SIMPLY ADAPTED TO SWIMMING AND THE OTHER IS MORE ADAPTED TO RUNNING.

IN COMPARISON EVERY ETHNIC VARIATION ON EARTH CAN BE TRACED BACK TO THE DARK CONTINENTS HUMAN POOL OF GENETICS. SO WHY IS THE HUMAN ANIMAL STILL CAUGHT UP IN TRIVIAL DIFFERENCES IN COMPLEXION AS A REASON TO ENVOLEK A PROCLIVITY TO VILIFY ANOTHER HUMAN DUE TO ONE'S OWN SENSE OF INADEQUACY. THE HUMAN ANIMAL SHOULD BE RECOGNIZING THE MORALS AND WAYS OF COMMUNITY TRANSMITTING FROM PRECEDING GENERATION TO A SUCCEEDING GENERATION OF YOU HUMANS.

THIS IS WHY WE WILL ULTIMATELY SUBDUE YOU, USE YOU AND AT THE TIME THAT YOU OUTLIVE YOUR USEFULNESS WE WILL THEN EXTERMINATE YOU. WHEN YOU TALK ABOUT RACE YOU DO NOT THINK OF THE EXTRATERRESTRIALS YOU INSTEAD INDULGE IN REVILING THOSE YOU FRANKLY NEED. ITS AMUSING HOW YOU DESPARAGE THOSE YOU WOULD CALL ALIEN ACROSS A TERRITORIAL BORDER FAILING TO RECOGNIZE THAT THE SURVIVAL OF YOUR SPECIES AGAINST THOSE OF US WHO EVOLVED ON ANOTHER WORLD AS YOU CAN NOT BE SO FOOLISH TO BELIEVE THAT YOU ARE ALONE IN THIS MASSIVE UNIVERSE.

I CONSIDER THE STATE OF YOUR WORLD AFFAIRS IN WHICH ONE FACTION OF HUMANITY TYPICALLY THINGS IT'S BETTER THAN ANOTHER FACTION, OR BECAUSE ONE FACTION HAPPENS TO HAVE MORE OF A PARTICULAR NATURAL RESOURCE IN ITS TERRITORY THAN ANOTHER SO ONE GROUP

WILL INCITE, MANIPULATE AND PROVOKE CONFLICT IN AN EFFORT TO GAIN CONTROL AND DOMINANCE OVER OTHERS. SO I ASK YOU WOULD THE ISRAELI GOVERNMENT CONTINUE TO RESPECT AND DISPARAGE THE HUMAN RIGHTS OF THE PALESTINIANS, OR THE UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT DENIGRATE THE RUSSIAN GOVERNMENT OR THE GULF STATES DISPARAGE IRAN JUST TO NAME A FEW FOR INSTANCE IF A STARSHIP APPEARED IN EARTH'S ORBIT DEMANDING UNEQUIVOCAL SUBJUGATION? WOULD THE PETTY CONFLICTS THAT PLAGUE HUMANITY PERSIST?

## The Glaring Contradictions in the Rhetoric of Prison Rehabilitation (Part 1)

By I.K.

*[The following is an excerpt of a piece that we did not have space to print in its entirety. Write to us and request the full version and endnotes if you so desire.]*

**"Hide nothing from the masses of our people. Tell no lies. Expose lies whenever they are told. Mask no difficulties, mistakes, failures. Claim no easy victories..."**

— Amilcar Cabral

**"Processionary caterpillars travel in long, undulating lines, one creature behind another. Jean-Henri Fabre, the French naturalist who died in 1915, once led a group of these caterpillars onto the rim of a large flower pot, so that the lead caterpillar actually touched the last caterpillar in the procession, forming a complete circle. In the center of the flowerpot Fabre placed pine needles, a main source of food for such creatures. With an ample supply of food close at hand and plainly visible, for seven days and nights the caterpillars circled the flowerpot until they died from exhaustion and starvation. Why? Because these mentally programmed creatures refused to veer off the beaten path.**

**People often behave in a similar way. Habitual patterns and ways of thinking become deeply established, and it seems easier and more comforting to continue these thought patterns than cope with change — even when change represents freedom and achievement..."**

— Dennis P. Kimbo

**"When the people who are in power want to...create an image to justify something that's bad, they use the press. And they'll use the press to create a humanitarian image, for a devil, or a devil image for a humanitarian. They'll take a person who's a victim of the crime, and make it appear he's the criminal, and they'll take the criminal and make it appear that he's the victim of the crime."**

— Malcolm X

Even more, like processionary caterpillars, many of these programs are relics of the past, which have proven to fail and, again, only scratch at the surface of what has driven many of us, for example, to use or sell drugs, resort to violence, think criminally, etc. For, our actions are influenced not so much by the choices we make but more so by the structural and cultural dynamics that operate systematically to reinforce our belief system which, generation-after-generation, creates our dysfunctional behavior. Seemingly, society has failed to grasp the concept: Criminals are "made" not born. We are made through a series of socio-political and economic processes that construct our reality. It is a reality, a culture, I still struggle with to this day out of a real but misguided sense to survive.

Somewhere, I recall having read that over 90% of crime is financially motivated. Yet, I'd estimate less than 1% of programs offered by CDC[r] assist prisoners to develop financial literacy or the sort of skills that will

assist us to meet our financial goals. Even more, with what programs that are made available, there are a number of impediments we face when trying to access or complete them:

- **Transfers:** For example, on June 7, 2018; I was transferred from Salinas Valley State Prison (SVSP, hereafter), Level IV, after having completed my first semester in the in-person college program to obtain a degree in sociology. SVSP is one of few institutions that affords the in-person college-level sociology program. Since transferring to a "lower" security prison, I now have to complete the program through correspondence courses, which presents a number of obstacles. Even more, I was initially told that I would be restricted from partaking in the in-person college program at the new prison due to my being sentenced to LWOP. Note: Each prison has different college programs.

- **Priority Levels:** CDC[r] imposes "priority levels," which are based on case factors (e.g., length of sentence, crime, security classification, educational needs, etc.) While such factors may seem to reasonably determine a prisoner's eligibility to partake in certain programs or determine what prison s/he will be assigned to (i.e., Level IV, III, II, etc.) it also determines what programs a prisoner will have access to and be excluded from. Note: Different institutions offer different programs and have different protocols for determining eligibility. So while a prisoner may qualify at one prison to partake in said programs, upon transfer that is subject to change as noted above.

- **Work Conflicts:** Upon assignment to an inmate work detail (e.g., PIA) inmates are prohibited from partaking in any educational or self-help program that has a conflicting schedule — that is, if it scheduled during the inmate's work hours, s/he cannot participate. This is so even if their supervisor grants permission to leave work early to partake in said programs. This policy has been implemented to assure worker availability to meet, for example, quotas in CDC[r]'s bustling prison industries.

- **Lockdowns:** Lockdowns and/or "Modified Program Status," I've learned, occurs at every prison irrespective of security level or incident (e.g., stabbings, fights, etc., which disrupt program status). In effect, they operate to hinder access to programs, which in turn causes us to receive "incomplete" status and/or prolong our ability to obtain the basic educational requirements (e.g., a GED) to advance our educational goals.

Of course, there are a number of other impediments that operate all the same, which begs of the reader to ponder the question: Is CDC[r] maximizing the implementation of its programs to best effect prisoner rehabilitation? In light of the foregoing, I'd have to say no! The numbers say it all. However, before I continue, allow me to digress to emphasize a very key point in CDC[r]'s funding scheme.

In the nonprofit sector, funding is largely contingent upon results. Programs are funded solely on account of their ability to meet their goals and objectives. When they fail, or only prove to be 30% effective, they get axed! This, unquestionably, places a tremendous amount of pressure on organizations to produce favorable results which, in turn, can encourage a sort of "cooking the books" type of reporting process. CDC[r] is no different.

Recently, I sat down with an Associate Warden here at California State Prison — Solano to discuss the prospect of hosting a Restorative Justice Forum, which was eventually denied. During the course of our discussion, he mentioned the fact that, up until a few years ago, CDC[r]'s funding scheme was based on "warehousing" bodies. It's now funded according to its ability to offer prisoners rehabilitative programs.

Seemingly, with millions of dollars slated to fund these programs, tax payers would be up in arms demanding to know: To what degree is CDC[r] being held "accountable" for managing their tax dollars in face of a 73% recidivism rate? Are they funding these programs based solely on availability or their effectiveness? With a 22% success rate, it's

only obvious the rehabilitative model currently in place is not based on results or a commitment to fund more effective programs.

Once, I heard a correctional officer say, "If you work around crooks long enough, eventually you become one." That said, with the enormous pressure on prison officials to effectively manage tax dollars, you best believe the "books" are getting "cooked" and they go heavy on the rhetoric to cover their tracks.

For example, on its website CDC[r] Division of Rehabilitative Programs (DRP) purports: "Programming opportunities are available to all offenders and are the best way for an offender to be prepared for success upon release. Programs are available at various stages during incarceration..." It then goes on to list a nine-step, "Step-by-Step Process" as to how an "[o]ffender's risk to recidivate and criminogenic needs are assessed..." On paper this all looks good. However, in light of the foregoing, especially the aforementioned impediments we face when trying to access these programs, it's all smoke and mirrors. The reality is, I'd say less than five percent of prisoners will have a chance to complete, for example, a vocational trade; less than 20% will obtain a GED; less than 5% will obtain a college degree, and some 40% or better will partake in some form of self-help program, which brings me to my final point.

In prison the concept of "change" is a constant forced upon us with little, if any, sense of rite of passage. Often, I point to the fact that change results

### Abolitionist Messages Projected onto Oakland Jail for International Working Women's Day 2019





from maturing and to mature a person must be able to experience the rituals associated with crisis or change of status (e.g., obtaining your driver's licenses, graduating high school/college, your first job, moving out of your parents' house, etc.). These are some very defining moments in our lives that significantly affect the development of our character. Because most prisoners have been incarcerated in their prime (ages 16-24) and, thus, deprived of these experiences, many fail to develop in these areas.

Naturally, the development of our character suffers with each experience we fail to attain and our growth becomes stagnant in many aspects. This is so because, in prison our sense of autonomy, for example, is almost completely stripped away from us the moment we step onto the yard. Consequently, most of us become so accustomed to having our decisions made for us by prison officials that, upon release, we have trouble adjusting to freedom.

Still and yet, for some, these rites of passage will come later in life, much later, if ever they will. We often see, for example, the 30-year-old inmate who finally obtains a GED after having spent half his/her life incarcerated. Commendable? Absolutely! But it speaks volumes about how the structural conditions devised by prison officials operate to stagnate our growth and become an obstacle to change.

## Our Editorial Principles

When preparing and publishing this newsletter we intentionally use a very light editorial hand. Pieces are generally published as we receive them. Partially, this is a pragmatic policy. We don't have the resources to do the editing, fact-checking, or development of multiple drafts that a collective devoted primarily to producing a newsletter might. We also do this on principle. We want to publish people's words as they are written, without inserting our own perspective or style during the editing process. We approach this project, as we do all our work, from the perspective that we are learners, and are always trying to improve. Please remember that the content of "Keep the Fires Burning" is not necessarily the position of IWOC Oakland.

Currently, we are reflecting on how to best maintain our approach to editing, while also functioning as a platform that may include controversial views, and facilitate dialog. A piece in Keep the Fires Burning #3 included criticisms of Gender Anarky and Sister Amazon. As with all contributions to "Keep the Fires Burning" the views in this piece are the author's own, and do not necessarily reflect the views of IWOC Oakland. We have received a letter protesting this piece and denying some of its claims. We regret publishing the portions of this piece that made direct accusations against groups and individuals. We can't publish the protesting letter because some of its content violates our editorial principles as stated below, but want to publicly acknowledge that this objection was made.

To reiterate some of our principles, we do not think this is a good platform for airing conflicts between individuals or groups, and we will avoid pieces that air personal beef or levy accusations at specific prisoners. This is something will be considering more carefully for future submissions. Please keep these principles in mind before submitting to us.

### Our Editorial Principles:

- All included work must be consistent with our organizations principles as stated in our Points of Unity
- We will only include work with the authors' consent, and will make minimal changes to accommodate space. That is, we will be faithful to each included author's meaning.
- IWOC is committed to horizontalism and will not allow this to be a platform for settling personal beef or for cultivating one's personal social capital. Thus, all written submissions will be published anonymously either under the author's initials or under a chosen pseudonym.

- We will not include work that is sexually explicit or overtly violent in nature (not because we're puritans, but because we want our paper to make it past the state censures)
- We will not include work that the state could use to incriminate the authors, the organization, or anyone else
- Space in the publication will be limited and therefore not all submissions can be included, but we encourage and appreciate every submission.
- We welcome feedback, criticisms and debate.

## Local Happenings

*Here's a quick brief to keep you informed of what we've been up to out here:*

- Thanks to the dedication of both new and long time jail support organizers we now make support trips to Santa Rita Jail every week! From 8pm onward, our crew gives out smokes, pizza, and rides to transit!
- March 8th was International WORKING Women's Day. Local IWOC organizers took part in a rally in solidarity with incarcerated women, reminding us that women's liberation means a world without prisons
- IWOC members marched with the Coalition of Black Trade Unionists on May Day to demonstrate and celebrate working class power everywhere
- We are presenting at a conference in May called Revolutionary Organizing Against Racism, and in June at a conference organized by Fight Toxic Prisons
- And making lots of friends and allies on both sides of the wall

### Your Writing and Feedback Needed

#### To our Friends, Comrades, and Co-Organizers,

Thank you so much to the folks who have contributed art and writing so far. Your contributions are and will continue to be the only things which make this publication possible. We hope to include many more pieces in the future, and to expand the breadth of the paper with your guidance.

To that end we are anxious to hear any and all of your thoughts about the editorial process, the newsletter as a whole, its title, or a piece of writing in particular. Please do not hesitate to send feedback. We hope for this to be a platform for analysis, collaboration, accountability, and mutual building, as well as an ongoing discussion over the walls. (When sending feedback please indicated whether you'd like it published or not)

As "editors" we try our best to publish the pieces we receive as they are. This includes not making judgments on spelling, grammar, or punctuation use (if you want us to spell/grammar check your work we can, just ask when you send in your submission). We think the pieces here, as well as many others we've received thus far, are thought-provoking and deserve to be read by you all.

Inside Outside, All on the Same Side,  
IWOC-Oakland

*Send feedback, inquires, responses, and additional orginial work to:*

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