

Coalition For Prisoners' Rights Newsletter

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Lower "Crime" Rates, But Some Prisons Grow

Incarceration rates reflect political and institutional decisions and the perceived self-interest as well as the values of the groups of people in power. Changes in so-called criminal justice policy, rather than changes in street crime (conviction) rates have been the most significant contributors leading to the rise in state prison population.

Despite street crime rates being at their lowest levels in more than 30 years, the U.S. continues to maintain large and increasingly militarized police units, on which it spends more than \$100 billion a year. This is not rational behavior; it clearly does not correlate with public safety.

Police forces have grown from locally-funded public safety initiatives and become a specialized federally subsidized jobs program. Success is measured by more arrests, not more safety or well-being. Racial profiling is increasingly accepted as public policy.

For the first time in a decade, state prison populations declined (minimally) last year. Almost half the states reported decreases in the number of people imprisoned. Not, however, Pennsylvania. Pennsylvania, in fact, led the nation in growth. Its system increased by 2,214 people--almost as many as the total number of prisoners went down.

Not until the 1970s, when U.S. politicians declared a "war on drugs"--which disproportionately affected people of color--did the prison-industrial complex begin to mushroom upward. Changes in sentencing laws were the major technique used.

RACIAL BIAS IN FEDERAL CLEMENCY

Whites applying to the Office of the Federal Pardon Attorney were nearly four times as likely to succeed as applications by prisoners of color. Sad but true, under the current president, 22 people have been pardoned. Only two of them are people of color.

In 1980, Pennsylvania's prison system's budget was \$94 million. Since then, the number of prisons has tripled and the prison population has multiplied six fold. And with all this, the population of the state has barely grown.

The state is currently building four new prisons, which will have space for 8,000 more prisoners. There will be two new prisons at Graterford, which will cost \$800 million.

And with the economic crisis that so many of us are suffering from, what mechanisms does Pennsylvania use to make this happen? It is done by sentencing those convicted of nonviolent crimes to longer terms. By keeping those sentenced locked up for longer parts of their sentences. By re-imprisoning those found to have technical parole violations. And, Pennsylvania is first in the number of people sentenced to Life Without the Possibility of Parole, including 450 people sentenced for convictions that occurred for activities when they were under age.

In contrast to the above is the situation in Colorado. There, a new 316 person prison in the Cañon City prison complex, called Colorado State Penitentiary II, opened for just 18 months and two-thirds empty, is scheduled to close next year. It is the fourth prison ordered to close there in the last three years.

At its highest, in July 2009, the state's prison population was 23,220. As of February 2012, it was 21,562. It is expected to decline by 900 more people by June 2013. Techniques used to accomplish this include: more use of probation and parole, drug treatment, mental health care, and a variety of community supervision methods.

RACIAL BIAS IN YOUTH DETENTIONS

African American youth in Cook County (Chicago area) are detained at 46 times the rate of white youth. This is the greatest discrepancy found anywhere in the country.

México elige presidente

El 1 de julio, Mexicanos han escogido un nuevo presidente que tomará decisiones que no sólo afectarán a sus ciudadanos en México sino aquéllos que viven en el exterior. Con el sistema de gobierno mexicano, cada presidente sirve un término de seis años, y no hay posibilidad de re-elección.

Del 1929 al 2000, un solo partido ganó todas las elecciones presidenciales, muchas veces con una aprobación de más de 70%. Este partido, llamado el Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI) ha sido criticado internacionalmente por fraude electoral y falta de transparencia. Durante esos setenta y un años, el presidente actual escogía al próximo candidato por lo que se llamaba el dedazo--señalándolo con el dedo.

En el 2000, por primera vez, otro partido tomó control de Los Pinos, residencia del presidente mexicano. Este otro partido, el Partido Acción Nacional (PAN), más conservador que el PRI y enfocado en la empresa privada, prometió grandes cambios en México. Pero a los pocos años, se consideraba el presidente Vicente Fox (2000-2006) un presidente fracasado por su inhabilidad de trabajar con una legislatura tan dividida. En el 2006, Calderón Hinojosa (PAN) ganó con 36.38% del voto mientras su rival de izquierda López Obrador (PRD) recibió 35.34%. López Obrador declaró fraude electoral....Y adelante....

Copies of the Newsletter will be included in all correspondence we send out. To receive the Newsletter monthly, send us self-addressed, stamped envelopes (with the CPR return address) --up to 12 at one time.

Please continue to send us address changes and renewal requests, in order to receive the yearly holiday card/new calendar.

Also, please note that the only address to use to be sure to reach us continues to be: PO Box 1911, Santa Fe NM 87504. And remember: NONE OF US ARE LAWYERS OR LEGAL WORKERS.

Many, many thanks to the Real Cost of Prisons Project for making our Newsletter available on-line for free downloading and distribution. It is at: <http://www.realcostofprisonsproject.org/coalition.html>. This is a GREAT site!

We continue to depend on our readers' financial contributions to be able to go on with our work. Checks and money orders made out to us should be sent to our address above. Thank you so much for your ongoing support!

CRIME OF THE MONTH

In the film "Total Recall," state security was extremely invasive--people were routinely scanned and their skeletal images were projected on to public screens. Pretty cool Hollywood imagery, until life imitates art. Within the next two years, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security will employ scanners at airports and elsewhere which make x-rays seem like low-budget special effects. The new machine uses molecular-level scanning technology which is one million times more sensitive than current airport scanners. And it can be used from as far away as 150 feet.

In addition to residue of explosives and bio-weapons (stuff every "would-be terrorist" brings to the airport, of course), it detects pharmacological substances such as medications, traces of alcohol, and street drugs. It also measures adrenaline output and other hormone levels. It reveals medical conditions such as cancer or other cellular anomalies and can tell what you've had to eat recently. All this can be done secretly, without your even knowing you are being dissected on the fly. Privacy? We don't need no stinking privacy!

The unnecessary intrusiveness of scanners is reinforced by the failure of the for-profit G4S security company--which also provides services to airports AND prisons to manage even to meet the staffing requirements of the London Olympics.

Our Crime of the Month isn't only about the makers and users of these offensive technologies. The worst crime is the acquiescence of the people of the U.S. who allow ourselves to be led silently to the slaughter house of our civil liberties, believing with mindless obedience that these invasions of our bodies actually keep us safe.

But safe from whom?

SAVE LWOP BENEFICIARIES PROGRAM

The Progressive Programming Facility (PPF), formerly the Honors Program at California state prison in Lancaster, is slated to be dismembered. Placement scores for LWOP prisoners have been reduced (about half of the PPF men) and the scores for Level IV raised. There is no Level III general population facility in the L.A. area. The PPF program remains the best functioning spot in the system. Join the 75% of the PPF men, who are petition signers, in calling for continuation of the program! Go to: www.prisonhonorsprogram.org for info.