

Accountability, Duplicity and Industrial Conspiracy

I spent yesterday afternoon discussing the situation of released prisoners with an old friend. He has been on the street for 4 years after a period of almost continuous incarceration from the age of seventeen. Now in his fifties, with little work experience, his chances of employment are slim. Sentenced to life imprisonment for a penitentiary escape and armed bank robbery, George will always be under the control of the penal authorities and like Little Rock Reed vulnerable to the misapplication of technical parole rules that can at any moment transform his life situation.

The current public climate of vengeance and retribution has given prominence to the right wing lobby groups (e.g., Victims of Violence) and politicians (e.g., The Reform Party of Canada) who are orchestrating the demand for yet harsher punishment, and the tightening of laws and their strict application in Canada. This does little more than heighten the already pronounced absurdities of an archaic and incompetent criminal justice system and serves to promote a more rigorous recycling of the damned carceral commodity. This is a **Jean Val Jean** scenario played out in the Orwellian setting of post-modern joblessness and competitive scapegoating.

How do longterm prisoners reintegrate - cope and survive - into a society that has used them as a carceral commodity and now uses their past as justification for their present disenfranchisement and relegation to the new "dangerous class". The sorry truth of the matter is that the skills and abilities my friend brings to the social bargaining table are largely irrelevant to his situation as a white, middle aged, working class French Canadian, **former prisoner**. He has been discarded and his primary utility in a restructured Canadian "free market" society is as an example of the far reaching **punitive power** of the crime control industry or as a future carceral commodity.

In this issue Paul Wright and Jon-Marc Taylor address the political economic context of current criminalization practices while Reed, Denisovich and Kim Pate link these concerns to the need for accountability within the prison industry. In the Prisoners' Struggles section, Lise Olsen and Reed reframe the issue of accountability by exposing the use of the crime control apparatus to suppress political dissent. Collectively these authors suggest that the lens of analysis of prisoners' issues must be focused at a wide angle. This understanding is also evident in a range of politically informed prison writing currently being published in numerous prisoner and political fringe publications.

Too often our discourse on criminal justice and incarceration gets lodged within the ideological arguments, issues and situations, created by the control industry itself. This serves to mask the distinction between the "personal troubles" of the prisoner and their context, the "public issues" of unemployment, homelessness, poverty and discrimination reproduced and exacerbated by capital's current national and international restructuring.

Our analysis of the "personal troubles" of the prisoner and the role and function of the crime control industry needs to be grounded within a consideration of the changes currently taking place in the economic organization and as a result, the social formations of western capitalist societies.

This mapping indicates that current and future social crises will reflect the growing scarcity of global resources, industrial overcapacity and the significant widening of class disparities. The attendant processes of disenfranchisement for the emerging dangerous class include longterm joblessness, poverty, and homelessness. There is clear evidence of an increased reliance on criminalization to control this underclass and the willingness of states to resort to considerably higher levels of official violence, including police use of deadly force, incarceration and executions.

The USA provides the contemporary model for penal repression in the "democratic" nation states of the west. Of particular note is the vastly expanded use of "control units" and their attendant regimes of social isolation, behavior modification and sensory deprivation. The wholesale use of administrative segregation to decapitate prisoner society through the removal of leaders, intellectuals, and spokespersons is an obvious example of the suppression of dissent and resistance. This is readily apparent in the situations of past contributors to the **JPP**. Gerald Niles is now in administrative segregation, fighting transfer to a Florida control unit. Though under close confinement, John Perotti continues to resist the wave of repression that has flowed over Ohio's prisons as a consequence of the Lucasville uprising. For the past year Mumia Abu-Jamal has been isolated in a death row control unit in the backwoods of Pennsylvania.

The rapid growth of "control units" and "control unit prisons" indicates the intended scope of the suppression of dissent in the USA. Since the refinement of the Marion control unit model in 1983, more than thirty-six states have created such facilities. The message is clear. According to current American penal custom, dissent and resistance to social and penal oppression will ultimately be dealt with by the physical and social isolation of the control unit. Tracing the flow of this line of development raises the spectre of the National Security State model, (refined by USA security operatives in Central and South America over the last four decades) as the future of post-industrial societies.