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## ``Editor's Introduction``

-Robert Gaucher

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The wave of repression sweeping the democratic nation states of the west continues to grow unimpeded. Justified by the politics of reaction and resentment, the disenfranchised are targeted as the cause of the rising levels of social fragmentation and disorder.

Fuelled by the rhetoric of the "war on drugs", illicit drugs, drug users and the underclass serve as social scapegoats for the escalating deterioration of urban living and social relations within capitalist societies (see Rothman, 1994). In Canada, the appropriation of the victims' movement by police associations and their fronts such as "Victims of Violence" has served to further mislead the general public and continuously promote the politics of scapegoating, vengeance and retribution (re: USA see Elias, 1994).

This wave of repression has resulted in the rapid growth of the number of prisoners and the seriously debilitating conditions of prison overcrowding in Canada, the United States and Britain. Victor Hassine's portrayal of this runaway situation in the USA provides a baseline for our discussion of these issues and affirms the "punitive warehousing" model of prison custom now dominant in these countries. In both Canada and the United States, the political economy of "warehousing the irredeemable" features highly disproportionate numbers of incarcerated people of colour: Blacks, Aboriginals and Latinos. The naked face of racism in American society is thoroughly addressed in James Morse's "In the Shadow of the Thirteenth Amendment" and its relationship to the death penalty in Michael Ross' "The Death Penalty in Black and White".

On June 1, 1995, Pennsylvania Governor Thomas Ridge signed the death warrant for the celebrated African American journalist and human rights activist Mumia Abu-Jamal. The date set was August 17, 1995, the anniversary of the birth of Marcus Garvey. Mumia, a past contributor to the *JPP* was convicted of the

murder of a police officer in 1982. His trial was a travesty of justice. His case highlights the racist, class bound criminal "just-us" prosecution system operating in Philadelphia and the USA. His legal counsel and supporters are demanding that the police be prevented from their intimidation of witnesses and the removal of "hanging" Judge Albert Sabo from further involvement in the case. Of the 31 people he has sentenced to death, 29 have been people of colour. We urge you to support Mumia by first contacting: EQUAL JUSTICE USA/MAJ-LDF at P.O. Box 5206 Hyattsville MD 20722 (ph. (301) 699-0042) or INTERNATIONAL CONCERNED FRIENDS AND FAMILY OF MUMIA ABUJAMAL at P.O. Box 19709, Philadelphia PA 19143 (ph./fax (215) 476-8812).

The extension of capital punishment and its use in the USA further exemplifies the domination of the retributive politics of reaction in that country.

For sizable segments of the electorate, ... capital punishment is a mirage promising a return to a more 'connected' world—a dream solution to a nightmare of social despair. (Jenkins 1995, p.5)

The recent restoration of the death penalty in New York State has led experts on the history of capital punishment in the USA to suggest that a record number of executions will take place in the next five years, likely exceeding the record yearly total of 199 in 1935. In the Prisoners' Struggle section of this issue we are featuring the writing of four prisoners currently on death row in the USA. We urge our readers to also take up their cases and this most vital issue.

In the USA, Canada and Britain, overcrowded prison conditions have placed prisoners and prison authorities under increasing pressure. This is reflected in a further reduction in medical attention, and the elimination of the scant "programs", educational and vocational opportunities, which previously existed. The resulting rise in tension and stress has led to the increased reliance on lockdowns, and rising rates of violence and death. According to Correctional Service of Canada information, from 1991 through 1994, the number of deaths by all causes in Canadian penitentiaries has more than doubled. If there is a bright spot in all of this, it is that for the first time in Canadian penal history, penitentiary staff were charged with homicide in the death of a prisoner. The downside is that the Court decided not to

proceed. Clearly the warehousing model of these "runaway prisons" hold "sanctioned degradation" as the "new" correctional policy of the postmodern world. In this issue the writing of Hassine, Lewis and Shep each provide a counter-inscription to this policy.

What are the solutions to these problems? As James Morse clearly argues, political economic agendas and societal attitudes must change before workable solutions are possible. In the USA and Canada, if we are to work towards preventing crime rather than simply reacting punitively toward "criminal" transgressors, the first order of the day is the elimination of the de facto and de jure segregation of people of colour. This requires seriously addressing the- poverty traps of the enclaves/groups now targeted by the state's agencies of social control and class repression.

Any solution must provide prisoners with the opportunity to take positive control over their destinies and provide avenues for reintegration as useful and productive members of society. In this period of economic recession and exclusion of at "risk" populations, the stigmatization of past criminalization and incarceration serves to bar the door to reintegration. The obstacles now facing released prisoners are discussed in the essays by McCormick and Morse. Morse's argument that the redeemed prisoner be used as a community resource in "criminogenic enclaves" is a viable initiative exemplified in Canada by the large number of aboriginal (former) prisoners who have become involved in the regeneration and defense of their "traditional" communities.

Certainly we waste our time looking to academe for innovative ideas and support. One only has to attend a major "criminology" conference in the USA to observe the entrepreneurial spirit of the criminal justice industry complete with its booths flogging the new technologies of repression. The situation in the Canadian and British academies is equally dismal. Last April I attended the "Prisons 2000" conference at the University of Leicester, UK, with the expectation that the line of analysis and critique established by the British "new criminologists" would feature prominently in the presentations. Instead I was surrounded by prison governors, home office administrators, and representatives of the Prison Officers' Association. My own presentation on "Prison Justice Day" in which I argued the need to "take

your foot off the backs of prisoners" was not well received. My antagonism to the Marion lock-down model and its expansion was attacked by no less than Professor David Ward and Norman Carlson. In this regard I was proudly informed by Mr. Carlson (BOP) that as a principal architect of the "Marion system" he thought that I was ill informed and had been listening to "convicted felons". Their anger became more understandable when I realized that their contribution to the conference was a paper which promoted the "lock down" regime and how to avoid the type of civil rights litigation that was taking place around Pelican Bay, California. This conference was organized by a major spokesperson of "Left Realism", which suggests to me that the critical energy of the new criminology has become "left luggage" in the UK.

The need for leadership and direction to prisoners' struggles is more apparent than ever. In Canada, because of a life threatening health problem, Claire Culhane has been forced to stop her prisoners' rights activities and will be sorely missed. Claire, thanks for the tremendous effort and your outstanding work as a leader and role model. We will never replace you but can assure you that many of us who have been touched by your strength and dedication will persist.

Now for some good news. Under the leadership of Rubin Carter and an impressive group of defense counsels, the *Association in Defense of the Wrongly Convicted* has been created in Toronto. *AIDWYC* will provide investigative and legal support for those whose convictions for murder are questionable. David Milgaard who spent 22 years in prison for a murder he did not commit discusses *AIDWYC* and his situation in the Response to this issue. If the urgency of such cases was ever in doubt, the death of Donzel Young in Collins Bay Penitentiary this spring clearly makes the point. Donzel Young's case was the first officially taken on by *AIDWYC*. *The JPP* is considering doing a special issue on wrongful convictions and therefore we encourage our readers to submit essays and profiles on wrongful convictions. I would like to welcome a new magazine, *Prison Life* which is being produced by Richard Stratton and associates in New York. A glossy uptown version of the traditional penal press, it has already made waves. To subscribe write: *Prison Life*, 50S-8th Avenue, New York, New York 10018.

I have been receiving numerous excellent manuscripts and ask our contributors to understand if their essays do not immediately appear in the *JPP*. The bulk of these manuscripts are from prisoners in the USA. I would ask that our States side writers bear in mind that much of our readership is Canadian and therefore to focus on issues that are pertinent on both sides of the border. The essays in this issue address the universal concerns of prisoners (e.g., overcrowding, warehousing, re-integration) that is focus of the *IPP*.

We are pleased to publish our first article from Britain. The rebirth of the penal press in that country is promising and we hope to receive manuscripts from other British penal press editors and writers in the future. A developing problem is the relatively small number of manuscripts being submitted by Canadian prisoners. If the *JPP* is to remain Canadian based we need more submissions. I would like to thank Kim Cunnington-Taylor for her hard work, effort and advice in the editing of this issue.

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