

Incarcerated Workers Organising Committee

The Imprisoned Worker

#1 Summer 2018

Building a Union Inside & Outside Prison

Working Class Solidarity



Against Prison Slavery



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2	<i>Introduction</i>
2	<i>IWOC WISE-RA Statement Of Purpose</i>
3	<i>About The IWW & IWOC WISE-RA</i>
4	<i>What Is The Prison Industrial Complex?</i>
5	<i>Organising Behind Bars</i>
8	<i>Some key facts about who is in prison</i>
9	<i>Poem: I Sure Damn Will Survive</i>
10	<i>A Prison Within A Prison: Separation Centre at HMP Frankland</i>
12	<i>Three Myths About Prison Labour</i>
14	<i>The Impact Of Segregation & Solitary Confinement on Prisoners</i>
18	<i>Self-inflicted Deaths In Custody</i>
22	<i>Turkish Prisoner Death Fasting</i>

Introduction

Welcome to the first issue of The Imprisoned Worker. This zine has been put together by the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) Incarcerated Workers' Organising Committee (IWOC). It aims to provide a platform for prisoners, ex-prisoners and fellow workers to educate and organise one another in order to agitate against the prison-industrial-complex

IWOC WISE-RA Statement Of Purpose

1. To further the revolutionary goals of imprisoned people and the IWW through mutual organising of a worldwide union for emancipation from the prison system.
2. To build solidarity amongst members of the working class by connecting the struggle of people in prisons, detention centres and young offenders institutes to workers' struggles locally and worldwide.
3. To strategically and tactically support prisoners locally and worldwide, incorporating an analysis of white supremacy, patriarchy, prison culture, and capitalism.
4. To actively struggle to end the criminalisation, exploitation, and enslavement of working class people, which disproportionately targets people

of colour, immigrants, people with low income, LGBTQ people, young people, dissidents, and those with mental illness.

5. To amplify the voices of working class people in prison, especially those engaging in collective action or who put their own lives at risk to improve the conditions of all.

6. To organise against the expansion of the prison industrial complex in Wales, Ireland, Scotland and England, including the six new mega prisons, which will harm the working class and create increasing infrastructure to exploit prisoners and profit from their imprisonment.



About The IWW & IWOC WISE-RA

The Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) is a revolutionary union founded in 1905 that has a rich and proud history of workplace organising and international solidarity.

The IWW recognises that prisoners are on the front lines of labour exploitation, societal violence, and the UK's history of colonial oppression and religious fundamentalism.

The British prison environment and culture is a melting pot of capitalistic and exploitative tactics, which are used against prisoners as an extension of societal oppression.

As a result, these poisons must be challenged in prisons, criminal justice institutions, and in all of us, through organised working class solidarity. This is why IWW Wales, Ireland, Scotland and England (WISE) started the Incarcerated Workers Organising Committee (IWOC) in 2016. We have been inspired by fellow workers in the US, who have been organising in solidarity with incarcerated workers since 2014.

IWOC is made up of prisoners, ex-prisoners and fellow workers who have supported loved ones and comrades in prison for over a decade, as well as others that recognise the injustices of the criminal justice system. Membership is free to prisoners. Our membership among prisoners is



growing. We aim to provide support to imprisoned fellow workers by being a point of contact and source of support on the outside to help prisoners organise on the inside. We are also here to make your struggles as visible as possible.

IWOC is also fighting against prison expansion, IPP sentences and other forms of injustice in the prison system. In North America, members have organised and participated in prison shut downs, strikes, and collective actions to win victories in stopping state torture, medical neglect and more.

The IWW has branches all over Wales, Ireland, Scotland and England that will join the struggle. Together we will work towards ending the inequality endured by working class communities, people of colour, immigrants, people with low income, LGBT and queer people, young people, sex workers, dissidents, and those with mental illness. Our motto is

"An injury to one is an injury to all."

What Is The Prison Industrial Complex?

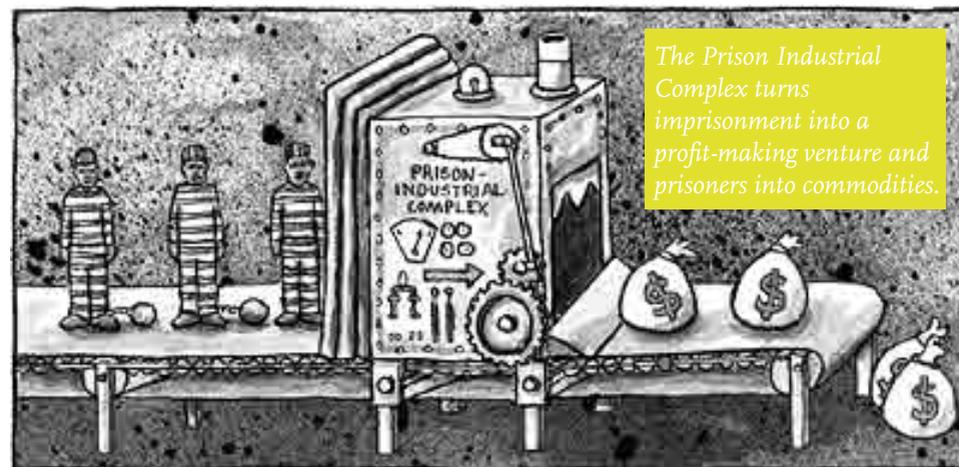
The Prison Industrial Complex (PIC) is a term used to describe the overlapping interests of government, industry and the media and their use of policing and imprisonment as solutions to economic, social and political problems.

The PIC is a web of relationships that are mutually reinforcing, between and not limited to prisons, the probation service, the police, the courts, all the companies that profit from transporting, feeding and exploiting prisoners, and the right-wing press.

The PIC turns prisoners into commodities that produce private profit for: businesses that contract cheap labour, construction firms that build prisons, and companies that pedal security and surveillance technologies. The vast wealth made by these private companies gives them a vested interest in prison expansion as the more people that are imprisoned

the more profit they can make. The profit motive also spurs investment in new repressive technologies, including body armor, weapons and surveillance equipment, which can be sold around the globe.

The PIC has been so successful because it has received political and media support. Politicians often get elected by being 'tough on crime'. While papers get sold by manufacturing and exploiting the public's fear of crime through tactics of sensationalisation. It is rare for establishment politicians or the right-wing media to encourage the public to care about the war crimes of the government or the environmental damage caused by multinational companies. Instead they manipulate personal tragedies to create public fear and to justify prison expansion. The PIC ultimately distracts the public from the primary problems of society: capitalist exploitation of the working class, nationalism, neoliberalism, racism, sexism, and patriarchy. And, sells a lie: that prisons make society safe.



Organising Behind Bars

By Ex-Prisoner Fellow Worker, Nicole,
February 2017

If there is one thing that I learned in my time inside, it is that prisons cannot function without the labour of prisoners. We cook the food, maintain the gardens, clean the wings, work at reception, do the laundry, pack the canteen bags. Without us, prisons could not afford the cost of keeping us imprisoned. Ironic isn't it?

It has inspired me to see, therefore, recent prisoner resistance in the United States (US). Across the US, prisoners have started to recognise the system's economic dependence on them. In 2013, the largest hunger strike in recorded history took place in California. More than 30,000 prisoners took part and effectively ended solitary confinement in Pelican Bay State Prison. This huge victory is a result of prisoner organising.

With mass incarceration so linked to for-profit prison industries, prisoners in the US now have more opportunities for leverage than ever. They are moving beyond hunger strikes to withdrawing their labour as well – and it is sending prisons into a tailspin across the US.

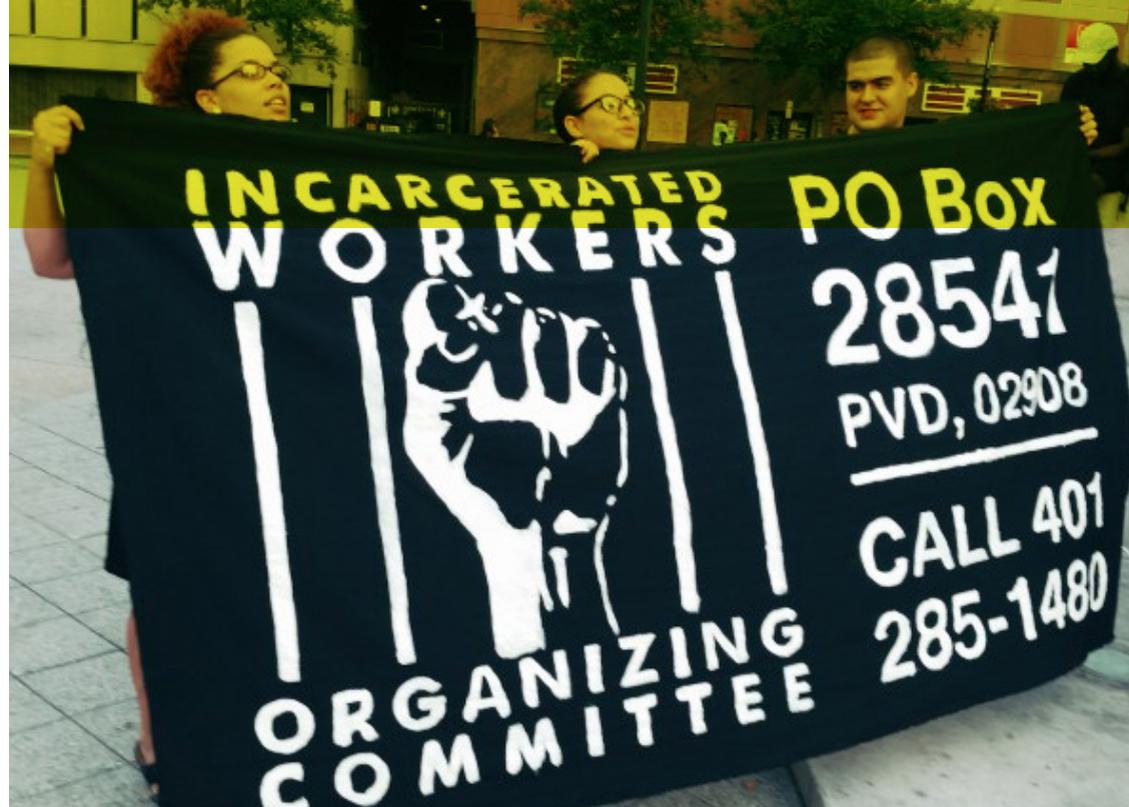
Multiple grassroots organisations and movements are fighting on the outside to support these prisoner efforts. One of these is the Incarcerated Workers Organising Committee (IWOC) which

is a part of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW).

We do not rely on the law, the courts and the politicians, all of which are complicit in the prison system. Instead, the IWW embraces direct action and the power of standing together to fight for our collective demands. In practice, this may include strikes, demonstrations, slowdowns, sabotage and organising free education for members. Unlike other unions, that simply fight for bigger pieces of the capitalist pie, the IWW's vision is for a world without the wage system, without prisons, and without capitalism.

IWOC emerged in the United States in 2014. It was started following the IWW's involvement in the Free Alabama Movement (FAM). FAM is a movement of prisoners, their families, and others who are fighting against the horrendous conditions prisoners face in Alabama. In the last two years, prisoner membership has swelled. There have been increasing numbers of organised work stoppages and huge volumes of literature has been distributed within the US prison system.

On 9 September 2016, on the 45th Anniversary of the Attica Prison Rebellion, the largest prison strike in history took place across America. It is estimated that more than 57,000 prisoners participated in 22 states across 42 prisons. The financial losses to the California prison system alone was as much as \$636,068 every day of the strike. Solidarity actions took place



in 60 cities across the US and around the world.

We know from being in prison that defending yourself on your own normally means an IEP, segregation, being ghosted out or worse. Yet we know that complaints don't work, talking to the IMB doesn't work, lobbying those in power rarely succeeds and the legal system is stacked up against us from day one. To bring the prison system to its knees, we need prisoner-led resistance. But prisoners need, more than ever, a strong movement of people on the outside willing to fight by their side.

IWOC would like to support prisoners, their families, friends, and comrades

to organise in whatever way they can. We want to act as a point of contact, to share information and be a source of support. We want to share news of prisoner organising around the world. We plan to produce this zine twice a year with content produced by prisoners here. Please send us your letters, articles, and artwork if you would like them to be published (our contact details are on the front page of this zine).

But more than anything, we want to have your back! We want to mobilise people on the outside to be at the prison gates screaming in solidarity when you're abused by officers. We want to block phone lines of prisons when they deny you medical treatment. We want

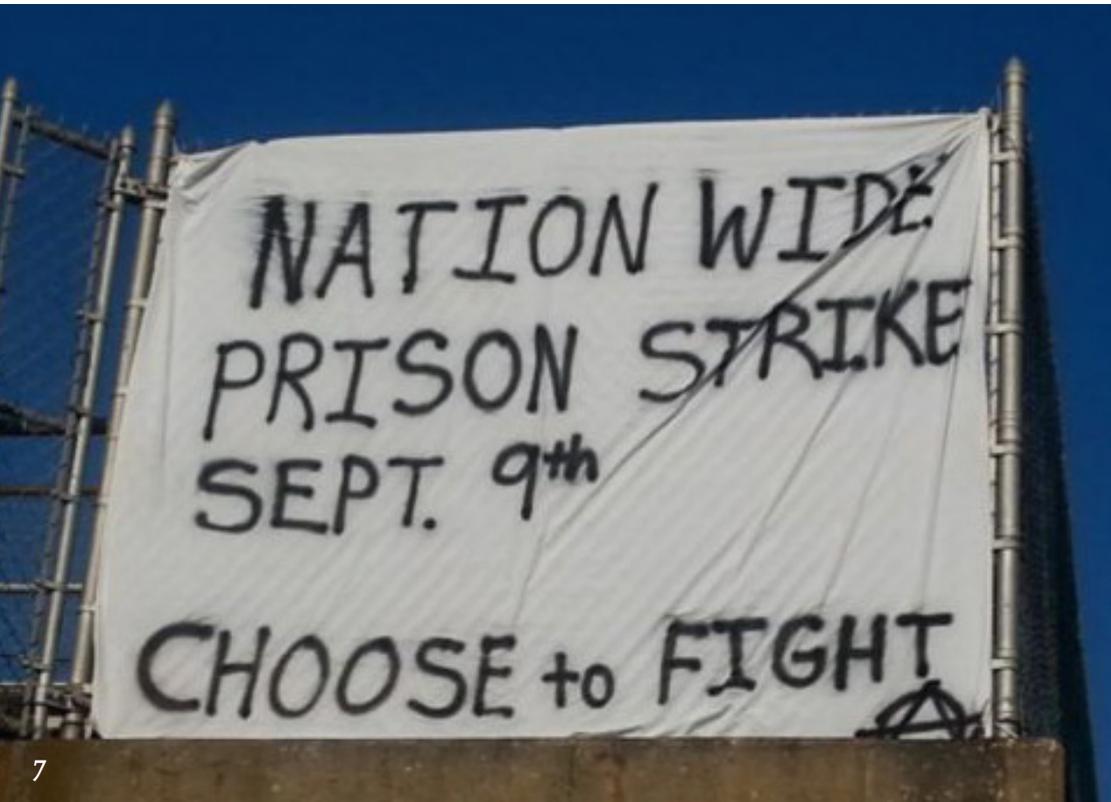
to support you to strike if you desire. We want to support prisoners to stop prisons from being profitable.

We believe, as witnessed in the US, that prisoners have power. Your struggles are not invisible. They are central to destroying capitalism, white supremacy, patriarchy, homophobia and many other forms of domination.

There has never been a more important time to organise. Government cuts are resulting in more violence, bang-up and neglect in prisons. More and more people are getting sent down and the British Government plan to build six mega prisons to further private profit from putting people in cages. All the while, it is becoming harder and harder

to survive on the outside. Benefit sanctions, horrific working conditions and zero hour contracts are the reality for most. It is a critical time to come together and fight for a different future.

By building relationships, working together and resisting the alienation and separation that prison inflicts on us, we can bring this system down. The IWW encourages people to educate themselves, organise and agitate together so that the working class is no longer exploited and we can begin to reclaim our lives. By joining the IWW you can find practical solidarity and support from people on the outside. You are not alone!



Some key facts about who is in prison

- *27% of the adult prison population has been in care.*
- *Almost 40% of prisoners under 21 were in care as children.*
- *72% of male and 70% of female sentenced prisoners suffer from two or more mental health diagnoses.*
- *Over half of the women's prison population has suffered domestic violence and a third has experienced sexual abuse.*
- *Over a quarter of the UK prison population is also from a minority ethnic group.*
- *Prison is also a tool to control 'surplus labour' (who are real people with real needs) in the United Kingdom, following the decline of major industries like mining and manufacturing in many areas of the country.*
- *The UK's first private prison opened in 1992. Between 1993 and 2014, the prison population in England and Wales increased by 91%.*

Poem: I Sure Damn Will Survive

You're a screw so why do you try to befriend me?
Then you say on paper you fought I sounded like a monster!
Wot did you expect coz I don't understand?
Yer I've assaulted screws and had the whole jail on lockdown
I barricaded thru pure frustrations, anger and hurt
However I'm a peacelover, I'm just Sam
I cannot swallow anymore corruption as I've already overdosed!
You told me I took a hostage and I allowed you 2
The girl had her ROTLS due and I wanted her to hold her children
Whereas I'm doing a life sentence, so have nothing to lose
Take my TV and lock me in like an animal, if that's the best you can do
Yer I went crazy after a few months in your seg
The beatings and isolation drove me mad, but still I survive
You left me cold and naked so those walls became my friends
Why did you want 2 see me broken in 2 a million pieces
Weak with heartfelt cries, my head bowed and no eye contact?
Then accused of assaulting another screw in a different jail
WTF, ghosted 2 this jail at 7am cos I asked 4 the CCTV evidence
Hello listen you already know I was the one assaulted
Does my mental health offend you?
Does my bipolar offend you?
Coz you seem 2 take it awfully hard
I'm so used 2 your bitter twisted lies
But your hatefulness will never kill my spirit
As my cell is full of love and happiness
And I laugh just the same as when I was free
I dance and you'd be surprised if you saw me
Coz that's the true Sam dancing and singing with life's losers
You'll be writing me down in history when I prove I don't belong here
So fuck your system, 2 fingers up 2 you
I'm still full of anger, but I sure damn will SURVIVE...

By Imprisoned Fellow Worker, Samantha Faulder

A Prison Within A Prison: Separation Centre at HMP Frankland

By Imprisoned Fellow Worker, Kevan Thakrar

A first instalment linked with the expansion of the inhumane control unit system labelled the Separation Centre (SC) system has opened. 'E' wing at H.M.P. Frankland in Durham, formerly a Vulnerable Prison (VP) wing dedicated to the management of elderly prisoners, is now an SC for those deemed to present a threat, either in person or by influencing others, which cannot be managed within mainstream population. The elderly have been left to fend for themselves having been moved to a normal wing.

E wing contains sixteen cells. It is not yet clear if all of them will be utilized. This wing has recently completed a refurbishment which included hidden microphones for covert surveillance. The segregation have had barriers

added to them to isolate them further and will now be used only by those on the SC. A gym is located on the wing since the prisoners will not be allowed to access normal facilities. However, it seems that only basic cardiovascular equipment like a running machine and rowing machine are available.

Prison Service Instruction 05/2017 which governs the SC system claims that "The Separation Centre Regime is as broadly comparable to the mainstream population as is possible, with individual risk assessment informing activity and management of the prisoner". However, the regime at the SC is in fact like those of Close Supervision Centres (CSC) and can best be described as indefinite solitary confinement.

The SC system is blatantly an unofficial CSC system designed to specifically discriminate against Muslim prisoners who are disliked, but have not actually done anything to justify a CSC placement. Ever since prisoners began legally challenging their arbitrary isolation in segregation units the prison service management have been planning alternative arrangements. Hence the SC system. Even the name betrays the the prison service's intention: SC rather than CSC, prison rule 46a rather than 46. SC's are a control unit plain and simple.





Three Myths About Prison Labour

Myth 1: Prison Labour Helps to Normalise Work

The Government's 'working prisons' policy stated its aim to get prisoners working up to 40 hours a week. This is impossible to deliver when cuts are ensuring less staff and longer bang up for prisoners. A 'working week' is not achievable with the staff shortages and staff cuts the state are imposing. The scarcity of work in the prison means it is used as a privilege and incentive to control the prison population.

There is also nothing 'normal' about being a worker in jail; where you have no choice, autonomy or control over the means of production. Research shows that work in prison – which is monotonous and tedious – does nothing to make work on the outside appealing or pleasurable. If anything, it ends up highlighting why it's easier and more rewarding to accumulate wealth through crime rather than through the wage system.

The main reasons that prisoners work is to earn money to buy phone credit and essentials in their canteens, since most prisoners do not have people that can send them money, and also because it is simply a way to get out of the cell. Work is an opportunity for social interaction, which is critical if people are to survive their sentences. It doesn't contribute in any meaningful way to 'rehabilitation.'

Myth 2: Prison Labour is Education

Prisoners actively opt-out of doing courses that could develop their literacy for example to earn more in prison workshops, since they are making less anyway. Most work in prisons is repetitive, low skilled, and not related to developing a useful trade. It is true that many people gain education in prison, such as through Open University degrees, but this is generally achieved in spite of the work they do, not because of it. It's a tragedy that in many cases, education only becomes an option when locked in a prison, rather than in the community, and that it is still so difficult.

Researcher Jenna Pandeli writes about how ex-prisoners with few skills are much less likely to find employment upon release. Low skilled jobs are moving abroad, and some are actually moving into prisons. Prisoners also tend not to learn marketable skills while in prison: "the findings suggest that prisoners are not, for the most part, taught a transferrable skill within orange-collar workshops. Arguably, the only skill they obtain is the capacity to complete boring and monotonous work (or develop strategies to cope with boredom and monotony)."

Where people do get qualifications, such as NVQs, these are often related to industries that are in decline, such as manufacturing. The fact is that ex-prisoners face the same work culture as other workers, meaning zero hour

The first victims of the SC are expected to be prisoners who were being held in segregation units, giving them the impression that they are being moved to a slightly better place so will be less likely to resist. Years down the line they may regret their participation in the transfer because by then their passivity will have been displayed as the effectiveness of the SC system and used to justify expansion of the SC system to capture more prisoners to face the psychological torture inherent in control units. It will not take long to fill the 'Field of Dreams' concept of 'if you build it they will come' which is always in play when it comes to prisons.

From at least as far back as the mid 90's the prison service has been fully aware that holding prisoners in these conditions is detrimental to their physical and mental health. This is shown in the then Chief Medical Officer Sir Ian Acheson's report into the effectiveness of these units on the

demonised Irish Prisoners of War who were held there at the time.

The Creation of the SC system can therefore be seen as a direct attack and deliberate act of harm by those legally bound to maintain a duty of care against imprisoned people who oppose their political views.

The financial cost of inflicting this harm upon the victims of the SC and, indeed, all control units is more than four times the cost per prisoner held in normal location. At a time when the prison system is in crisis, through underfunding, and is struggling to cope with excessive numbers of prisoners, for exorbitant amounts to be found solely for these invidious purposes, makes clear how much the welfare of prisoners really matters to those operating and managing prisons. The sooner an end to this massive waste of public money occurs the better: *close the control units and end the torture!*





Despite the fact that many prisoners have been damaged in their lives, prisons do not offer them healing. They are more likely to hinder any attempts for people to live the lives they want, due to their disruptive nature and traumatic impact on people and their families.

Historically, prison labour began as a way to keep prisoners occupied, and as a way of disciplining them through pointless tasks like breaking rocks or turning tread wheels. Later, it became clear that prison labour could serve the interests of capitalists and those in power more explicitly. A large part of the prisoner workforce is made up of lifers, and long term prisoners who will not be re-introduced into wider society any time soon. Employers tend to prefer long-termers. A lot of people working in prison workshops actually have enough skills to work at jobs and end up getting banned for security reasons, and many jobs exclude drug users. Thus, those with the most complex needs remain subjected to the worst jobs, or no jobs at all.

contracts, minimum wages that are impossible to live on, poor working conditions, workplace stress and so forth. Effectively, they are at the bottom of the hierarchy of a mass of unemployed people.

Myth 3: Prisoner Labour is Important for Rehabilitation

Prison is not about rehabilitation. That is part of a liberal worldview that sees imprisonment as an inevitable part of modern society. It raises the question, what does rehabilitation mean? Is there a 'model citizen' we want prisoners to become? Do we want them to be functional for the economy as consumers and producers? How does that affect the world outside of prisons?

Prison labour is not about rehabilitation. Prison labour is about disciplining prisoners, keeping them busy, and exploiting them for private profit. No part of it is about care or generosity.



References

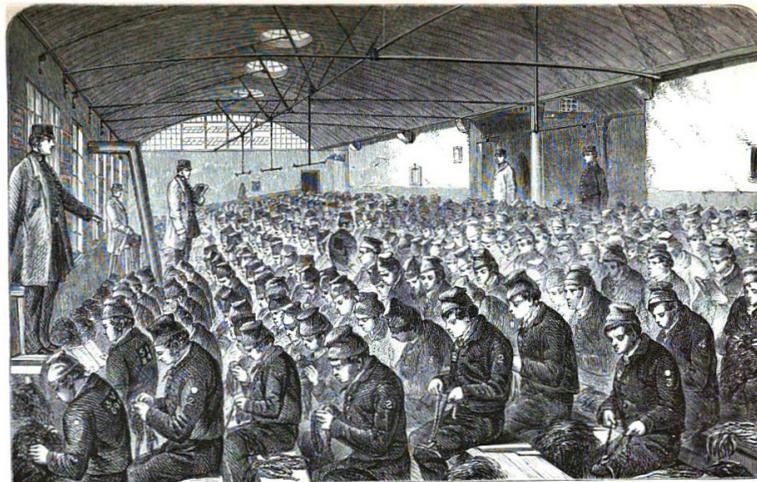
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The Impact Of Segregation & Solitary Confinement on Prisoners

By Imprisoned Fellow Worker, Kevan Thakrar, July 2017

Before entering the notorious Close Supervision Centre (CSC) system back in 2010 I had very little knowledge of either segregation or solitary confinement. Having just turned twenty three years of age and spent as little as two and a half years of those in prison, my mind was not and never had been focused on or even interested in this topic. Midway through my seventh year of isolation things have changed: the horrors I have witnessed and torture I have been subjected to over this period of time have left me with little option but to become fully aware of the devastation even short periods in these conditions can have.

For those who have not experienced solitary confinement there are no words or description that could allow you to fully comprehend what this ordeal truly means. I should probably start by explaining that the official terminology of solitary confinement equates to at least twenty two hours a day locked away with every hour of the day spent in isolation from other prisoners. Whereas, segregation is the removal from normal location without specified conditions although generally both equate to the same thing due to the harshness of segregation units



WORKING IN A ROOM (UNDER THE SILENT SYSTEM) AT THE MIDDLESEX HOUSE OF CORRECTION, GOLDBATH FIELDS.



within the UK. The CSC is commonly described as a prison within a prison; it allows for indefinite isolation of prisoners under the most oppressive conditions. Effectively permanent segregation, almost always meets the definition of solitary confinement and it is from here that I bring you my voice.

The common belief is that prisons are holiday camps, human rights have led to things being too easy for prisoners. This propaganda betrays the deplorable way prisoners in segregation are treated. The Prison Reform Trust (PRT) did some good work with their 'Deep Custody' report although, they could never truly reflect the dire reality of life in these appalling environment without living it themselves. Prisoners in segregation are routinely abused by

prison officers appointed to look after their care needs, starved, assaulted and made to live in filthy cells made of nothing more than an empty concrete box wearing the same clothes day in and day out. A holiday camp offering this would not sell many tickets. Only when the extent of what solitary confinement entails is accepted will it be possible to understand the impact it has and consideration of alternatives be made.

One day, less than six months after first being placed in the CSC, I was shocked into awareness of the consequences of what I was enduring. Another prisoner who had been unfortunate enough to be located in HMP Woodhill CSC unit along with the rest of us (never totalling more than ten) had been

struggling to cope since his arrival a few weeks earlier. He complained of the difficulties he was having and was directed toward the psychiatrist who duly prescribed medicine to help him survive the CSC. As the effects wore off he continually required higher dosages. Eventually, the drugs were not enough, he began to hear voices and took action to put a stop to it. Using a prison issue razor he sliced off one of his ears out of pure desperation, even this did not resolve his problem. Pumped full of anti-psychotics, anti-depression drugs, anti anxiety drugs and sleeping pills the reality of the CSC did not go away for him.

About six weeks later he removed his other ear, yet this man had seemed totally fine in the beginning. This man simply crumbled beneath the weight of pressure that being in solitary confinement puts on a person. Having seen events like this occur again and again with nothing being done to prevent mental deterioration of human beings held in the CSC it is apparent

that this is happening by design.

The official objective of the CSC is to reduce alleged risk factors of the prisoners detained within it then return them to mainstream prison population. However, the statistics show a darker picture. More than half of all prisoners who enter the CSC are driven insane before being removed to a psychiatric hospital, less than 10% actually ever return to normal conditions. Hearing this the question is not what alternatives are there? but why is this being allowed?

Self - mutilation is one symptom, but dealing with extreme environmental stress manifests itself in many ways most of which are unhealthy. You would think that the few prisoners lumped together in these places would form some kind of solidarity to overcome their shared ordeal, but instead, an irrational hatred for everything forms or they attempt to appease their guards by joining in with the victimisation of a particular individual.



Racism is more prevalent in the CSC among those who have suffered there the longest. It is an outlet to focus their rage when the faceless bureaucrats responsible for inflicting the harm upon them are out of reach. It is encouraged by prison officers. I am certain that discriminatory views are developed fastest and held strongest by those who spend their meagre allowance purchasing tabloid newspapers; this says something about the weakness of mind of the prisoners held in these conditions leaving them open to manipulation. This danger has, though, always been known which is why prisoners of war have faced such conditions and why the CSC's should rightly be labelled as torture camps.

Literature exists on the impact of segregation and solitary confinement on prisoners, indeed, it is because of this that the sadistic individuals managing the prison service utilise it so frequently. It is used as a weapon against the vulnerable, marginalised and all too often the minorities. Considering that the CSC was invented by Michael Spurr, who is Chief Executive Officer of the National Offender Management Service, it is unlikely that alternatives will be developed soon.

Amnesty International, in their report 'United Kingdom Special Security Units: Cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment?' , condemned the segregation units when they were operating under a different name and with a less oppressive regime. This raises the issue of whether a simple

re-branding can enable the torture perpetuate to be avoided.

Desperation consumes so many prisoners being held in solidarity confinement which leads to desperate acts. In 2015 at Woodhill CSC one man even began the transition to become female purely to escape the dreadful environment then, committed suicide before achieving his goal, he was no longer able to tolerate the constant harm. This is not humane yet, steps are being taken to expand the use of segregation through the creation of what are being called 'Segregation Centres' aimed specifically at the minority group of Muslim prisoners.

With segregation being almost unheard of in the female prison estate it has been shown to not be required. A total abolition of the CSC solitary confinement and segregation units is the only way to end this insidious destruction of human minds and lives.

Write to Kevan:
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Self-inflicted Deaths In Custody

By Fellow Worker, Ruari-Santiago McBride, October 2017

A 'death in custody' refers to those who die in prison, as well as those who die within two weeks of being released from prison. Over the past thirty years, as the prison population across the Britain and Ireland has increased dramatically, conditions have deteriorated and the number of deaths in custody has risen. A large proportion of deaths in custody are self-inflicted and/or drug-related.

Self-inflicted and drug-related deaths in prisons are linked to pre-existing mental health conditions, the psychological distress brought on by imprisonment, and inadequate mental health support both inside and on release from prison. These deaths are not inevitable. They are preventable tragedies brought on by the shortcomings of the criminal justice system.

Some statistics...

In 1990, within prisons in England and Wales, there were fifty-two self-inflicted deaths in male prisons and one in female prisons. In 2016, there were 120 male (a number which could grow further as forty-seven deaths in custody are awaiting classification) and twelve female self-inflicted deaths (three await classification). There has

been over 2049 self-inflicted deaths in prison since 1990. These statistics, provided by Inquest (www.inquest.org.uk), do not include deaths in immigration removal centres (IRCs) and immigration detention centres. Neither do they include deaths in Irish or Scottish prisons.

Between January 2007 and December 2016, seventeen people died by hanging, and six died in drug-related circumstances in Northern Ireland. Between 2012 and 2016 there were twenty-two suicides and nineteen drug-related deaths in prisons in the Republic of Ireland. In Scotland there were thirty-two self-inflicted deaths between 2010 and 2016 (though 60 deaths in Scotland await an inquiry). These figures reflect the extent to which prison is used to contain and control those experiencing mental health issues.

Mental Health

People who are sent to prison have poorer mental health compared to people who are not sent to prison. This is both true for everyday mental health issues, such as anxiety and depression, as well as more severe psychiatric diagnosis, such as schizophrenia and manic depression.

Psychiatric medicine is prescribed to prisoners in disproportionately high numbers. This is a result of both racism and classism. Working class and Black Minority And Ethnic (BAME) people, who are over-represented

among prisoners, experience mental health problems as a result of capitalist economic exploitation and structural inequality.

This is made worse by institutional barriers that both working class and BAME people face when trying to access adequate and timely mental health support. GPs are too quick to write prescriptions for addictive opioid-based psychiatric drugs, which may momentarily numb the stress and pain of living in an exploitative and racist society, but offer little in the way of resolving a person's emotional distress in a meaningful way.

Judges who are predominately middle/upper-class and white are disconnected from the everyday realities of the people in the dock before them. They have never had to go to sleep hungry or experienced severe discrimination. Poor mental health is therefore often interpreted as an excuse, rather than a factor that needs to be considered. Many judges also operate on a false belief that people will receive

equivalent, or perhaps even better, mental health support in prison than they will in the community. This dangerous assumption means people who would benefit from being diverted away from prison, and offered long-term psychological therapy, are sent to toxic institutions which make things worse.

Toxic Institutions

Over the past twenty years, there has been significant reform in prison healthcare, in response to the increasing imprisonment of people with severe mental illness. Perhaps the most significant reform has been the transfer of responsibility for prison healthcare from the prison service to the National Health Service (NHS).

The aim of this reform was to ensure prisoners received an equivalent service as people in the community. However, prison life is not the same as community life. Imprisonment is purposely dehumanising, a form



of retributive punishment meant to inflict shame and suffering so as to act as a deterrent. Imprisoned people lose access to the things that promote mental health, such as family and friends, employment, and recreational activities.

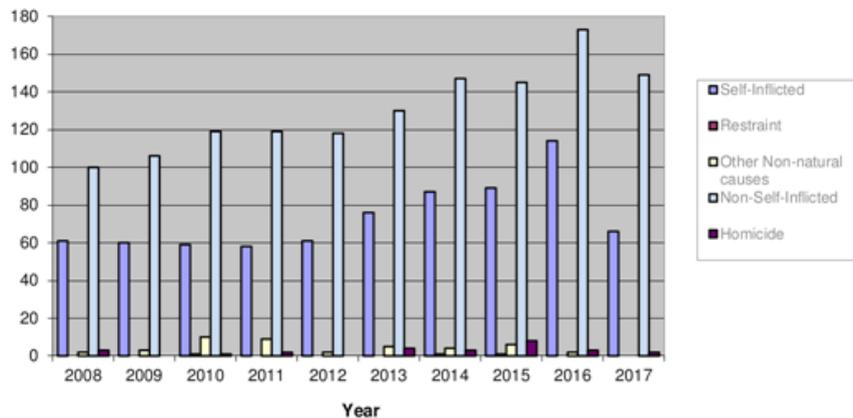
Prisoners are stripped of their autonomy and detained in a violent, hyper-masculine environment, which not only provokes anxiety and fear, but also inhibits expression of any emotion that might be construed as weak or soft. The most vulnerable often wear a mask of bravado, meaning they are often considered a trouble maker rather than someone in need of support.

Guards, not trained to deal with mental health problems, can prevent timely access to mental health support by delaying referrals. Prison GPs, who

lack specialist mental health expertise, can also delay referrals to mental health teams and may stop someone receiving medication prescribed on the outside. This can cause unnecessary stress and is often driven by security concerns, rather than clinical need. If a prisoner does access specialist mental health provision it is often orientated to dealing with the challenges of prison life, rather than in-depth psychological therapy. All of these issues are felt more readily by prisoners on remand and on short sentences, since mental health services are hesitant to invest finite resources in those unlikely to complete programs.

As a result of these issues, people in prison may begin to consume, or consume more, psychiatric drugs in order to escape their boredom, anxieties and fears. Others may begin

Deaths in Prison
England & Wales 2008-2017



to self-harm, since they are unable to discuss their emotional turmoil, either out of fear of being considered weak or because professional support is not readily available. Self-harm is commonly understood by mental health professionals as a call for help. However, prison guards, and even mental health nurses in prisons, often come to view it as a form of manipulation. As a result people who self-harm are stigmatised rather than helped.

Prisoners who openly discuss being suicidal risk not being believed. If they are believed, they are placed on observation and monitored so they do not kill themselves. However, they rarely receive the comprehensive support they require to overcome suicidal thoughts. Nurses, guards, governors and the institution operate on the basis of keeping prisoners alive until they leave the prison, when they are left to fend for themselves.

Returning to the community

When a person leaves prison they do so emotionally troubled, psychologically damaged, and under a cloud of stigma. They face challenges of reconnecting with friends and family, negotiating the welfare system, finding employment, and obtaining secure and safe housing. Some will have the additional burden of addiction. Many will have the pressure of licence conditions and probation rules to abide by.

Many people leaving prison are estranged from friends and families

and therefore lack supportive social networks. They are unemployed and their opportunities to find work are limited due to their criminal conviction. They are homeless and provided with hostel accommodation that is neither secure nor safe, and in which drugs are readily available. Those in psychological distress or with a mental illness diagnosis are at the mercy of lengthy NHS waiting times for specialist mental health support. Throughcare arrangements, which aim to provide a person receiving mental health support in prison with a degree of continuity as they resettle into the community, are good in theory, but rarely succeed in reality.

The lack of public investment in safe, secure housing, back-to-work programmes, and dedicated mental health support for former prisoners mean people leaving prison are at a high risk of death, particularly during the first two weeks after release.

The need for solidarity

Self-inflicted deaths among prisoners are a damning indictment of the criminal justice system's unwillingness to divert vulnerable people away from prison. They are a reflection of prisons' inability to fulfil their duty of care, and a manifestation of society's disregard for the rights of imprisoned people. Prison simply doesn't work. It doesn't rehabilitate the people sent there, and it fails the ones who need proper care.



Turkish Prisoner Death Fasting

By Fellow Worker, Ze Ahmed, October 2017

Lale Colak died upon release from Kartal Prison, Istanbul, on December 20, 2000. She couldn't speak, her mouth was ulcerated, and her hair had turned white after 222 days without solid food. Lale's mother says that she didn't want to die, but was militantly devoted to a wave of prisoner hunger strikes that took aim at the expansion of Turkish mass incarceration.

"You don't know the terrible situation in prisons, mother," she said early into her fast, "we do this to make life better for all humanity." According to her sister Dilek, Lale's final movement was a slow, gentle smile.

In October 2000, as part of a growing trend in prisoner resistance, eleven groups ranging from Marxist revolutionaries to Kurdish liberation factions coordinated hunger strikes in opposition to the construction of F-type prisons in Turkey. F-types were meant to replace communal dorms that were increasingly organised (Minister of Justice Hikmet Sami Türk described them as being controlled by terrorist groups) with American designs that feature CCTV cameras and one to three inmates kept in individual cells, as initially outlined by Turkey's 1991 Anti-Terror Law.

Although the strike initially focused on political prisoners, it expanded rapidly, and eventually included participants from outside prison as well. "Death fasters" consumed only water, sugar, salt, and sometimes tea and vitamin B1, until their bodies collapsed. The

Turkish government was so threatened by this approach, which turned death itself into a protest, that it responded quite brutally, before letting the strike gradually lose momentum on its own.

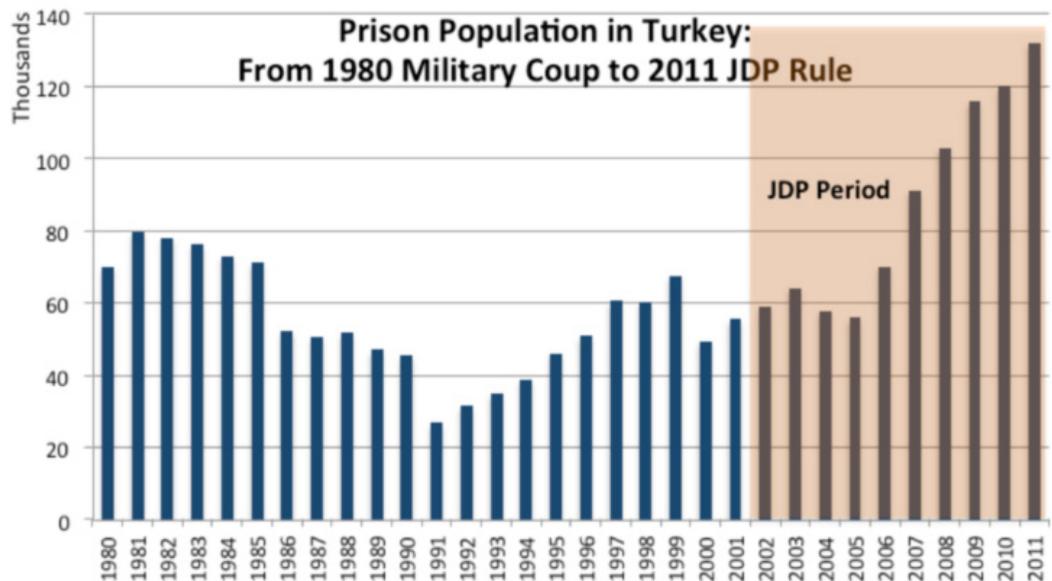
According to Amnesty International, from October onwards, over a thousand prisoners in dozens of prisons joined the hunger strike. The first “death fast” began on November 20 of that same year. Hundreds of death fasters would ultimately participate in the strike, which by October 2001, had spread beyond the prison system, with strikers emaciating themselves in four “houses of resistance” in the Istanbul shantytown of Küçük Armutlu. In April 2001, the first striker died, and over a hundred death fasters had died by mid-2013. Broadly, the strikers’ starvations-as-protests were interpreted as acts of martyrdom that took aim at disciplinary violence more abstractly, whether in prisons, or the slums.

During the week of December 19th to 26th, 2000, in response to months of hunger strikes, ten thousand soldiers waged Operation Return to Life and violently occupied forty-eight prisons. The Turkish military stated that this was to “protect” the strikers, who were being forcibly starved by the leaders of illegal radical leftist organisations. The Human Rights Foundation of Turkey suspected that the military’s offensive was especially severe, and included the firebombing of prisoners, which the military conveniently blamed on prisoners burning themselves alive.

These reports were in line with an established pattern of official brutality in the Turkish prison system. Amnesty International found that by October 2000, there was a general climate of unaccountable violence towards inmates. In September 1999, ten prisoners died and dozens were injured following violent clashes with guards

and soldiers in Ankara Central Closed Prison. On July 5th, 2000, political prisoners barricaded themselves in the dormitories of Bardur Prison, provoking an armed response with smoke bombs, tear gas, bulldozers, truncheons, roof tiles and stones, with prisoners being dragged out with long-handed hooks, and severe cases of sexual violence and torture. Ultimately, Operation Return to Life backfired, and triggered an expansion of the hunger strike.

By June 2002, nearly every group had ended its participation in the strike, although individual fasts continued over the next four years. The strikes failed in their immediate objective of stopping Turkish prison expansion, though it was a difficult objective in the first place. Turkey pushed through the



F-types because it needed to rehabilitate its Midnight Express reputation ahead of a possible bid to join the European Union, and deal with an unavoidable bottleneck in its prison system.

Since General Kenan Evren’s dictatorship in the 1980s, Turkey has been committed to neoconservative standards of social deviancy, that effectively make it a crime to be poor, vulnerable, and from a challenging background. These moves produced a massive criminal population. Evren

also cracked down on civil liberties, banned unions and political parties, led vicious anti-leftist purges (particularly in universities), and imprisoned more than half a million people. His government empowered the military and instituted harsher punishments for an expanded list of crimes, making the Turkish prison system more rabid overall.

Evren also introduced neoliberalism, which resulted in greater economic precarity for many people, and unsurprisingly, a rise in criminal behaviour. He also heavily promoted Islamist religious moralism as an alternative to communism. Facing problems of overcrowding, disease, political unrest, and collapsing infrastructure, Turkey had the option of either modernising its prisons, or scaling back its criminal justice system. While protesters aimed for the latter, the Turkish state was always biased towards the former option.

Obviously, strikers didn’t achieve their immediate objectives. There are currently thirteen F-type prisons in Turkey, holding prisoners that are charged with drug offences, organised crimes, aggravated life imprisonment, and armed militancy.

However, by the end of the strike, the death fasting had evolved to be about more than just the prisons. F-type prisons, with their unique combination of severe isolation and mass surveillance, represented the wider zulüm (“oppression”) of an unjust society. Death fasters in particular



were concerned with responding by using their bodies to push back against a range of coercive practices (both legal and extrajudicial) designed to correct deviancy.

For many of the strikers, their objective was about the political expression of dying in the face of social injustice more generally. The hunger strike was meant to give its participants the opportunity to regain control over their lives, while resisting efforts to forcibly confine those who stray from a suffocating model of ideal Turkish citizenship.

The sheer excessiveness of the military's crackdown during Operation Return to Life clearly shows how much this form of resistance shook Turkey's political establishment. Similar to the

politics of grief and martyrdom in revolutionary Iran, and the Kurdish prisoner death fasts in 1996, the F-type strike succeeded because it managed to lethally portray the extent of ongoing zulüm. Its themes are particularly relevant given Turkey's current descent into dictatorship over the last year, and Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's bloody anti-democratic outlook.

Under the circumstances, it is not unlikely that intense violence as a protest tactic (including death fasting) will return to the forefront of Turkish politics.



BECOME A MEMBER - JOIN

All members of the IWW that are earning enough pay dues as a contribution to the Union. It is the policy of the IWW that no financial barrier shall prevent any worker from joining; as a prisoner you have FREE membership. Members will receive a membership pack and support from IWOC. The IWW is against all forms of inequality and discrimination.

Name

Prisoner Number Date of Birth

Prison Name

Address

Postcode

TICK IF YOU NEED LARGE PRINT MATERIALS

Please let us know any other access requirements

What is your preferred language?

Have you been a member of a Union before? Yes/No
Please state any Union Roles if so

Please list any other skills you might be able to offer

We understand not everyone has a release date. If you have one would like to be put in contact with your local branch and have preferred contact details post-release please write them below.

Phone Number

Email Address

Location (Nearest Town/City)

Date likely to be released

Your Authorisation

I confirm I am a worker and not an employer, that I wish to join the IWW and that I accept and will study the unions aims and constitution.

Signature Date

Send this form to: IWW, PO Box 5251, Yeovil, BA20 9FS



