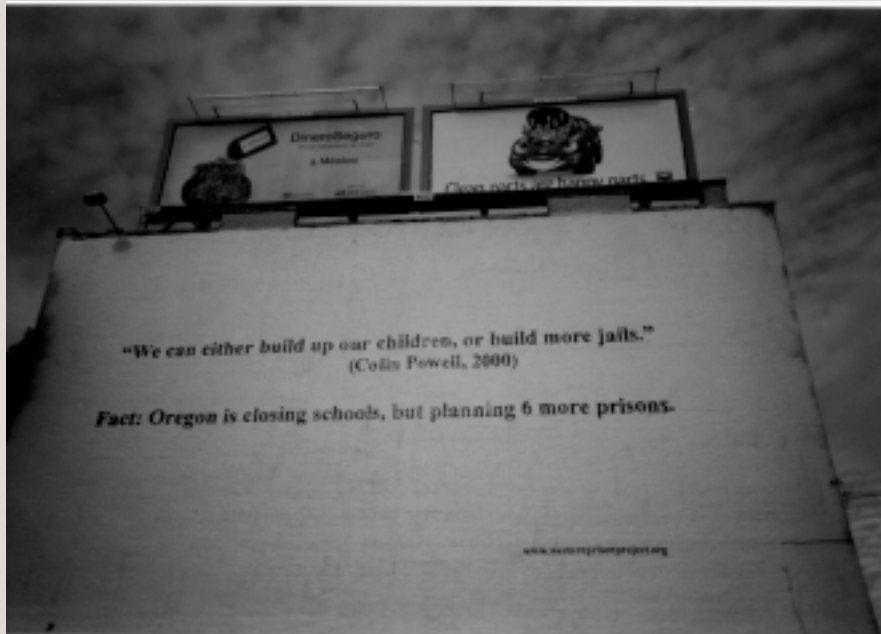


Justice Matters

Newsletter of the Western Prison Project

Spring 2002

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Schools Not Prisons Billboard Campaign

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Message to our Readers

This issue of Justice Matters is the first issue we've printed since last fall. Many of you have written and expressed concern that your mail was not reaching you or, that Western Prison Project was having some difficulty. The good news is that WPP is doing fine, we've just been swamped with the work of activism, as you'll see when you read through this issue. It takes many days to pull together an issue of Justice Matters, and the truth is that we weren't able to carve out the time given our small staff and extra-large "to do" list. We'd like to apologize to all of our members and readers for skipping the winter issue, and for getting this spring issue out so late. To make it up to you, and to make sure this won't happen again, we are going to do two things: 1) all memberships/subscriptions will be extended for an additional six months; and 2) we are hiring another staff person this summer who will have primary responsibility for making sure that Justice Matters gets out on a regular, quarterly schedule.

As for what we have been doing, there are now twenty-six member organizations of the Western Criminal Justice Reform Coalition throughout our region, and many of us came together in Salt Lake City in April to talk about prison conditions, legislation, and the growth of the criminal justice reform movement in our states (see page 16). It is clear that there is a growing, grassroots movement for criminal justice reform, and that many former prisoners and prisoners' family members are taking leadership to move this work forward.

One of the many challenges that prisoners face when they return to the community is regaining their civil rights. This summer, Western Prison Project is launching the VOICE (Voter Organizing for Increased Civic Engagement) Project to reach out to former prison-

ers and their families and help them register to vote. We believe that the more of us who make the effort to get politically engaged and register to vote, the more power we will have to reform the criminal justice system and support policies that help the low-income communities where most prisoners come from (see page 14).

For the past several months, WPP has worked very hard in Oregon to build public support for slowing down or stopping the prison-building boom in our state. More and more Oregonians are realizing that our state is becoming a place where we may not be able to offer children a decent classroom and good education, but we'll be sure to have a prison cell available for them. We are very excited about the growing work of prison activists, rural activists in towns where prisons are proposed, and students and others who care about education. On pages 10 through 13 we share some of this information, and hopefully some of the excitement, with you.

In closing, I'd like to say a few words about our special focus section on spirituality this issue. For many of us, both on the inside and the outside, working on prison issues can be hard on the body, mind and spirit. So what gives us hope and the motivation to carry on? Each person has their own answer to this question, but for many of us, some form of spirituality is key to keeping our equilibrium in a crazy world, and to helping us continue to do the work we need to do. We hope you find something of value in this issue's section on spirituality, whether or not the articles speak to your personal beliefs.

Brigette Sarabi
Western Prison Project

Justice Matters is published quarterly by:
Western Prison Project
P.O. Box 40085
Portland, OR 97240-0085
(503) 335-8449
info@westernprisonproject.org
www.westernprisonproject.org

WPP Board of Directors

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Brigette Sarabi, *Director*
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Anthony Davis, *Prisoner Support*
JoAnn Bowman, *VOICE Project*
Alanna Moore, *Program Assistant*

Logo Design by Bryan Potter Design

Newsletter Staff:

Layout & Design: Jack

Editing: Brigette Sarabi

Contributors: Julia Lutsky, Steve Reimer

Tara Herivel, Sonny Boyd



The Western Prison Project is a project of the Western States Center, a 501(c)3 non-profit organization based in Portland, OR. We exist to build and strengthen the prison activist and criminal justice reform movement in OR, WA, ID, MT, WY, UT, and NV.

The Good, The Bad & The Ugly

Quote of the Month

When asked where she'd rather do her time Sen. Dianne Feinstein, D-California after visiting "Camp X-Ray" in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba replied, "Given a choice between being held in San Quentin or Cuba, I'd rather be in Guantanamo Bay". *Source: AP Wire News*

An Injustice to one is an Injustice to all...but

Charles Schwarz, a former NYC police officer who is serving a 15 year prison term for the brutal attack on Abner Louima, filed legal papers asserting that prison authorities are holding him in inhumane conditions, including keeping him in "a solitary confinement hole with a concrete slab for a bed and limiting his recreation to one hour a day in an animal cage". Schwarz is currently incarcerated in Springfield, Mo. *Source: New York Times*

Executions Worldwide Double in 2001

The number of prisoners executed in the world doubled last year, according to a report by Amnesty International. At least 3,048 state executions were carried out in 2001, more than twice the 1,457 killed in 2000. Four countries

accounted for 90% of all executions worldwide: China, Iran, Saudi Arabia and yes, the United States. Amnesty stressed that the numbers only included those executions reported by governments. According to an Amnesty source: "It is impossible to give a complete total because many countries deliberately keep the true number of those executed secret."

China killed more prisoners than all other countries combined. During a "crackdown on crime", China executed 1,800 people in a four-month period alone. *Source: Amnesty International*

Texas Aggressively Recruiting Prison Guards Laid Off By Other States

With a shortage of 2,700 prison guards, the state of Texas sees a silver lining in the budget woes of other states like Ohio, Illinois and Michigan that have had to close prisons and lay-off guards. Brian Olsen, Executive Director of the Texas chapter of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) said he is working with Texas prison officials to inform unemployed officers about job opportunities in Texas. One complication is that applicants have to appear in person for interviews, and the

Texas Department of Criminal Justice doesn't pay the travel expenses of job candidates. Another complication not noted in the article is

that Texas pays some of the nation's lowest wages for prison guards. *Source: Dallas Morning News*

Illinois Commission Calls for Abolition of Death Penalty

After the 13th innocent person was discovered on death row in Illinois, Governor Ryan called for a moratorium on executions and established a commission to look at what could be done to make sure that no innocent person would ever be executed in the state. The final report of the commission, released in April, calls for 85 reforms, including: ending the execution of the mentally retarded, videotaping police interrogations, and prohibiting death sentences based on the testimony of a co-defendant or a jailhouse snitch. However, a majority of the commission concluded that even with all these reforms, the death penalty could never be fully fixed and should be abolished. *Source: Human Rights Watch*

Prisons to Use Force in DNA Testing

The California legislature approved a bill that would allow prison officials to forcibly extract blood or saliva samples from prisoners for a state database. It is estimated that there are about 3,000 California prisoners who have refused to voluntarily provide DNA samples. Under the new law, officials no longer need to get a court order to use "reasonable force" to collect the DNA samples. The bill still needs to be signed by Governor Davis, but a spokesperson for the Governor indicated that he expects the Governor to support the bill. *Source: Los Angeles Times*



Chinese woman being led to her execution
Source: Reuters

Regional News

WA: Legislature Passes Drug Sentencing Reform Bill

The Washington State Legislature passed a bill (HB 2338) to reduce prison terms for some drug offenders. The bill, sponsored by Rep. Ruth Kagi and supported by King County Prosecutor Norm Maleng, was signed into law by Governor Gary Locke in April. The new law reduces prison terms for low-level drug dealers by about six months for first-time offenses (previous sentences were two years). The measure also takes the money saved through reducing the costs of incarceration and puts it into drug treatment and prevention programs.

The original push for the sentencing reform came from the Washington state and King County bar associations, which made reform recommendations late last year. Their stand was that nonviolent drug offenders should not be prosecuted or imprisoned at all. The next step, according to Andy Ko of the Washington ACLU, will be for the state to show its commitment by seeing that money saved in corrections is used for drug treatment. "The public is way ahead of the legislators on this issue," Ko said. "But there's an awful lot of work left to be done." Source: Eastside Journal, ACLU Washington, King County Bar Assoc.

WA: Prisoners Stage Food Strike

Prisoners at the Washington State Reformatory in Monroe staged a food strike in February to protest the quality and quantity of food. Over 90% of the roughly 800 prisoners turned up for meals on the first day of the strike, which lasted several days. This was the second food strike at Monroe in two years. According to Willie Daigle, spokesperson for the Monroe Correctional Complex (which includes WSR), "they just

felt they weren't getting enough food." Sources: *The Herald (Everett, WA)*

WA: First Washington Summit on Criminal Justice Reform

Last November, activists presented the first, statewide summit on criminal justice reform, held at Seattle University. Over 250 people and dozens of organizations participated in the two-day conference to address criminal justice issues in Washington state. The confer



Don Merkle & Rev. Harriet Walden, Wa. Criminal Justice Reform Summit

ence was organized along two broad topics: A Struggle for Human Rights, and Building a Just Society. It was coordinated by the Washington Criminal Justice Reform Network, with support from the Western Prison Project and dozens of co-sponsoring organizations. Topics included police accountability, drug law reform, prison conditions, the juvenile justice system, immigration rights, alternatives to incarceration, and strategies for change. For more information about the ongoing work of Washington activists on these issues, contact the Reform Network at: www.reformnetwork.org Source: *Western Prison Project*

WA: 3 Strikes Law Targets African Americans

According to a report released in February by Washington's Sentencing Guidelines Commission, African Americans are sentenced to life sentences under the state's "3 strikes" law at a much higher rate than whites. The report shows that African Americans, who make up just three percent of the state's population, make up thirty-seven percent of the state's three-strike lifers. While the

commission's analysis was careful to say that the report doesn't suggest that racial bias exists, many others say that it is well known that young black males are more likely to be sentenced to prison than are their white counterparts.

Washington's "3 strikes" law was passed into law in November, 1993, making it the first in the U.S. In Washington, almost 50 felonies are classified as strikes. Before the law took effect, life sentences were reserved only for aggravated murders. Source: *Seattle Times*

OR: DOC Chief to Retire

Dave Cook, Director of the Oregon Department of Corrections, announced his retirement on May 15th. Cook, 54, will leave his position on June 30th. Asked why he was leaving, he stated: "Because the world is full of possibilities, and I'm not getting any younger."

Cook took over the job of corrections chief in mid-1995. Since that time, the Oregon DOC workforce has increased from 2,100 to 3,700, and its two-year operating budget has increased from \$508 million to nearly \$1 billion. Cook stated that he is troubled by the swelling prison population driven by

Regional News

Measure 11, the state's mandatory sentencing law passed by voters in 1994. "It's pretty distressing to think about 12,000 people locked up and that's the best response we have," he said. "What are we going to do, just create some endless opportunity to incarcerate people? That concerns me."

Governor Kitzhaber named Cook's deputy, Ben de Haan, as interim director.

Source: Statesman Journal

OR: Appeals Court Limits Drug Free Zones

In early February the Oregon Court of Appeals significantly limited the scope of a Portland city ordinance that enacted what the city called "drug free zones." The zones gave the Portland police power to exclude people from the zoned neighborhoods without a conviction. According to Chip Shields, Director of Better People (an agency working with former prisoners), the drug free zones "means you can't easily go to the store. It means you can't easily visit your mother or live in your own home. It means you can't do any of these things unless you get a specific variance, an approval, from the police to do so." Shields said criminal defense attorneys say the Appeals Court ruling makes a conviction for criminal trespass essentially unenforceable for those whose only offense is being on the public streets of the drug free zone when they have an order excluding them.

As of late May, the Portland Mayor and the District Attorney's office are proposing a reworked version of the law. While it softens the drug free zone ordinance to a certain extent, it also seeks to get around the Appeals Court ruling by creating the new crime of violating a variance, which would be established by city ordinance.

Source: Oregon News Service, Better People

OR: Campaign to Replace Death Penalty Folds

In late February the Life for a Life Campaign abandoned their efforts to repeal Oregon's death penalty. The campaign made the decision after polling results showed that a majority of Oregonians still supported the death penalty over life without the possibility of parole. According to campaign spokesman Geoff Sugerman, the polls showed that Oregonians "are more concerned about the recession and the aftermath of September 11th. They want to maintain the status quo right now."

This was the second go around for the Life for a Life Campaign, which narrowly missed collecting enough signatures to put the initiative on the ballot in 2000. Rather than go forward with the signature gathering effort given public attitudes this year, campaign supporters made the decision to pull back and not risk a potentially unsuccessful campaign. The death penalty was reinstated by Oregon voters in 1984.

Source: Oregonian

ID: State Tries to Sell Prison Law Libraries

Idaho's prison system is trying to auction off a roomful of outdated law books that have been gathering dust ever since the Idaho Department of Corrections eliminated prison law libraries in 1998. But according to Teresa Jones, a DOC spokesperson, "We haven't had any luck selling them." The state is trying to sell the books on eBay, the internet auction site. The books are the contents of five law libraries that prisoners used to be able to use to research appeals and other issues. Idaho eliminated the law libraries and replaced them with books of legal forms and the services of a paralegal.

Jack Van Valkenburgh of the ACLU

of Idaho wishes the law libraries had been left in place. "We get requests regularly for case law to be mailed to inmates, and we don't have the resources," he said. "For incarcerated individuals, there's no right that's more important than your right to access the courts." The ACLU sued the state in 1992, charging that the libraries were inadequate, and that inmates who tried to access courts or help other inmates do so faced retaliation. The suit was dismissed in 2000, but not before two state attorneys were fined for improperly reading prisoners' legal mail.

Source: Spokesman-Review (Spokane)

ID: Legislature Denies DOC Request to Keep Secret Records

In January, the Idaho legislature rejected a "catch-all" clause that corrections officials added to a list of specific records that will be withheld from the public under Idaho's public records law. Without that clause, the DOC rules clearly identify documents that cannot be released, and that means all other records are open to the public.

Until two years ago, Idaho's prison system had a broad, blanket exemption from public disclosure laws. But after a major scandal last year about corruption in the correctional industries program, the legislature ordered the department to develop specific rules laying out what shouldn't become public. The "catch-all" clause that the DOC included in its new rules effectively canceled out the entire process, returning to a blanket exemption from public disclosure. But Idaho lawmakers weren't buying it, and rejected the clause. "The rule was too vague and open-ended," said Rep. Jim Clark, a member of the Judiciary Committee, which voted unanimously to reject the proposed clause.

Source: Spokesman-Review (Spokane)

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NV: Former Nevada Prison Chief Now Leaves Virginia DOC

Ron Angelone, a controversial prisons director in Virginia, and before that in Nevada, is leaving the Virginia Department of Corrections. Within six months of his appointment as Virginia's corrections director in 1994, Angelone announced plans to arm guards with shotguns loaded with rubber pellets, placing Virginia among three states where guards carry guns inside prison perimeters. He imported the policy from Nevada. "We shot 200 inmates in Nevada last year," he boasted in 1994.

In Virginia, Angelone personally designed Wallens Ridge and Red Onion, two notorious supermax prisons that have been the subject of several lawsuits and human rights abuses reports. When asked about the lack of rehabilitative features at these prisons in 1998, Angelone said: "What are they going to be rehabilitated for? To die gracefully in prison?" The state of Virginia rents out beds in the two supermax facilities to other state prisons systems that are short on space, including the state of New Mexico.

Source: *The Virginian-Pilot*

WY: State Having Difficulty Finding Site for New Prison

Wyoming has a problem housing its prisoners. In December, the state signed a contract with Corrections Corporation of America, a private prison operator, to house Wyoming prisoners at a private prison in Colorado. Department of Corrections Director Judy Uphoff said no one prefers to house inmates out of state. "I don't, the staff doesn't, the legislature doesn't. They need to be in state." But the state is having a hard time finding any Wyoming com-

munity that could provide enough workers to staff an 800-bed, medium security prison. DOC would not have an easy time staffing in any Wyoming community she said. "That's a concern the legislature is going to have to be real aware of, and look at. 800 beds anywhere is going to take some real work staffing. That's something somebody for twenty, thirty years is going to have to deal with, having adequate staff," she said. Uphoff said a community considering a prison must weigh the likely impacts of a prison on social services, law enforcement, the county attorney's office, and more.

Source: *Billings Gazette*

Is This The Way We Want It? Sunny Hancock

I was talking to my neighbor just across the backyard gate,
We talked about how business was, it's sure been bad of late:
At first they stopped the logging,
now the ranching's hit the skids,
And there ain't no money left for us to educate our kids,

Our highways look like cow trails and I reckon as of how
To travel up them mostly takes a pretty tough old cow.
Seems like they always raise our taxes, just last week they took a poll
I think they take that dough to Salem and just dump it in a hole.

He said the folks that run this country (course they mostly run it down),

Are gettin' set to build a prison for us just up north of town,
They're gonna' do us folks a favor, bring some money in and "shucks"
The thing will only cost us right at thirty million bucks.

'Course they won't use many locals when they parcel out the jobs,
They'll import some pros from Portland, hell we're just a bunch of slobs.

I'm sure there will be positions for the folks like us ole pard,
Such as sweeping out the cell blocks, maybe working in the yard.

They'll heat with geothermal water, that's the cheapest way to go
Will it dry up your and my well?
Well they just don't seem to know,
It will affect a lot of ranchers in an unimportant way
They can't raise any more alfalfa, have to go to dry land hay.

After it is built and running, and it's all turned back to us,
Why we'll bear the cost of maintenance but there's no need to fuss,
At least our neighbors won't be hayseeds, they'll be real "hip" folks I'll bet,
They'll probably teach us lots of things we haven't even heard of yet.

But now I've thought a little more, I kinda' hesitate,
The life I've just described to you just doesn't seem so great,
So if you want an opinion "this is strictly only mine"
I think they ought to put their prison somewhere where the sun don't shine.

Sunny Hancock, who lives in Lake County, is a nationally recognized Cowboy Poet and active in the fight to stop a 400 bed prison in his community.

State Budget Cuts and Corrections

Good News and Bad News: The Recession's Impact on State Corrections Budgets

By Julia Lutsky & Brigette Sarabi

Editor's note: this article was originally written in December, 2001, as states were just beginning to grapple with serious budget shortfalls. It's been a rapidly changing landscape, ever since. We have updated the picture, and the article below represents our best effort to describe the status of state budgets in relationship to corrections spending, as of early May, 2002.

Just when the recession began depends upon which economist you read; that the recession had arrived became evident in the aftermath of the September 11th tragedy. Tax receipts (from sales, corporate and personal income taxes), are all reported down and many will fail to meet projected levels. Budgets for fiscal year 2002 show 44 states reporting collections below projections; a third of the states report that they are not on target for expenditures. Overall, the budget shortfall at the state level this year is estimated at \$40 billion. The budget crisis is highlighting the issue of government spending on incarceration—especially as people begin to see the cuts to education, human services and other basic programs that are required as corrections spending locks-up more and more of available revenues. The way states are choosing to respond to the budget crisis has been a fast-moving and very fluid landscape, especially in the arena of corrections spending.

When revenues are down and needs are up, how do states balance their budgets? Some of the measures available to address budget problems include: budget cuts; use of reserves (such as tobacco settlement money); hiring and/or wage freezes for state employees; and reconsideration of previously planned or approved tax cuts. Many states are being forced to look at all of these options this year.

How will this downturn in the economy affect the present emphasis on “bigger and stronger” prisons? Since a nationwide decline in the crime rate began nine or ten years ago the number of prisoners in some states, notably in the northeast, has begun to decline slightly. During the last six months of 2000, the state prison population declined by approximately 6,200 or 0.5 percent, the first such measurable decline since 1972. The number of federal prisoners, however, actually rose 7.5 percent - from 135,246 at the end of 1999 to 145,416 projected for year end 2000. Because of the declining crime rate, the trend to fewer prisoners might be expected to increase in the coming years, but whether it will or not remains to be seen.

While declining crime rates and growing budget constraints offer an opportunity to rethink corrections spending, there are additional issues and trends that we must be aware of. As a general rule, the number of prisoners tends to rise during times of economic recession. The drive to privatize has not decreased and companies dependent on prison construction and operation are not about to fold their tents and fade away. On the contrary, their pressure, and political contributions, are likely to increase. Pressure from communities to keep existing prisons or to construct new ones for the jobs they would provide is also likely

to increase because of layoffs in both the public and the private sectors. And finally, at year-end 2000, state prisons were operating between full and 15 percent above capacity while federal prisons were operating at 31 percent above capacity.

The prison-building boom itself is likely to be slow to respond to the budget crisis. What may well be affected, however, are the few left to prisoners such as health care (including mental health care) and the few remaining education, vocational training and drug treatment programs.

Ohio, facing a predicted two-year shortfall of \$1.5 billion, made a decision in January to close the medium-security Orient prison, which held 1,724 prisoners. Dr.

Ohio, facing a predicted two-year shortfall of \$1.5 billion, made a decision in January to close the medium-security Orient prison, which held 1,724 prisoners.

Reginald Wilkinson, Director of the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Corrections, had a choice of 34 prisons to close as a cost-cutting measure, including private prisons. Closing Orient is projected to save \$41.9 million in annual operating costs and cancel \$16 million in capital projects. Ohio was also cited by the Justice Policy Institute in a February report as one of three Republican controlled states (Louisiana and Texas were the others) that had made moderate changes to sentencing and parole policies, as well as promoting additional alternatives to incarceration, as a means of responding to rapidly escalating corrections costs. According

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State Budget Cuts and Corrections

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to Wilkinson, Ohio's approach to making careful reforms are what allowed it to close the prison and make other cost-cutting measures without decreasing public safety. In 2001, Ohio's prison population decreased by 2.1 percent, as compared to 1.4 percent average decline in the rest of the Midwest.

Louisiana has a Department of Corrections budget of \$600 million this year, up from approximately \$340 million six years ago, largely because of the introduction of mandatory minimum sentencing. A bill passed by the State Senate in 2000 containing large scale sentencing reforms will, among other things, end mandatory minimum sentencing for some non-violent offenders, reduce sentences for drug possession and create a panel to consider the release of prisoners. It is estimated these measures could save the state \$60 million.

The **Michigan** Department of Corrections \$1.6 billion budget has been cut by \$54.9 million (part of \$295 million in total cuts to the state budget). As part of the cuts, the state closed prisons, including the Jackson Maximum Facility and the Michigan Reformatory in Ionia. In an effort to save corrections officers' jobs, the Corrections Department has been moving sentenced prisoners still in county jails to the state's Reception and Guidance Center before going to the prisons where they will serve their sentence. But county sheriffs are saying the loss in state money will cause a financial crunch for them and may cost local officers their jobs (the Corrections Department has to pay counties to house state prisoners in local jails)

Looking at a looming state budget crisis, in December **Illinois** made the decision to close the Joliet Correctional Center, its oldest maximum security prison. But the new year brought little good news for the budget, and Govern-

nor George Ryan announced plans in February to close two more prisons, the Vienna Correctional Center and a juvenile prison in St. Charles. This announcement brought an angry outcry from the corrections officers' union, AFSCME, as well as local towns where the prisons are located. By April, as the projected state budget deficit for the fiscal year beginning in July reached \$1.2 billion, Governor Ryan made a further proposal

Looking at a looming state budget crisis, in December Illinois made the decision to close the Joliet Correctional Center, its oldest maximum security prison.

to release 4,500 drug offenders from Illinois prisons to cut costs. "The state of Illinois has never had problems like we have today," said Ryan, a Republican, at an April press conference. Meanwhile, state legislators, caught between a fiscal crisis and upcoming elections, are hesitant to make cuts or to raise taxes. In early April, the Democrat-controlled Illinois House bowed to major pressure from the corrections officers' union and local towns, and passed legislation to stop the closure of the Vienna and St. Charles prisons. And the Cook County state's attorney's office is opposing the release of drug offenders with less than seven months left on their sentence, as the Governor has proposed. (*As this article goes to press, final decisions on these cuts had not yet been made.*)

Then there's **California**, where the budget issues related to corrections are raising more than a few eyebrows. Facing a projected \$22 billion state deficit, and a declining state prison population,

Governor Gray Davis is still pushing his plan to spend almost \$600 million for a new, 5,000 bed prison in Delano that prison opponents, including several state legislators, claim is not needed. He also approved a major pay hike for the members of the California Correctional Peace Officers Association (CCPOA, the union representing prison guards) that will add \$500 million in annual costs to the corrections system. These moves by the Governor have led to several strongly worded editorials in major newspapers in the state, which question Davis' continued largesse to the prison system at a time when all other state programs are facing devastating cuts. More than one editorial has commented on the fact that Davis received over \$2 million in campaign contributions from the guards' union, as well as over \$200,000 in additional contributions just weeks after he approved the unprecedented pay raise. In addition, Davis has approved the closure of five, privately run correctional facilities in the state (workers in these facilities are not represented by the CCPOA). This has brought the private prison industry, as well as local towns facing job losses from the facilities, into the political arena, where they are lobbying hard for the continuation of these facilities. As we go to press, the fight around California's corrections budget is still hot and heavy.

In our region, both **Oregon** and Washington are facing severe budget shortfalls that could affect corrections spending. Oregon, with the nation's highest unemployment rate, is facing a deficit approaching \$1 billion for the current biennium which runs through June, 2003. Last fall, state agencies were asked to plan for ten percent cuts. The Oregon Department of Corrections said a ten percent cut would require closing six minimum-security prisons. Clos-

State Budget Cuts and Corrections

ing these facilities would have required the release of approximately 1,600 minimum-security prisoners who are within two years of their scheduled release. Not surprisingly, especially in an election year, after two special sessions the Oregon legislature maintained enough funding for the DOC to avoid closing any facilities. In addition, funding to proceed with building new prisons in Madras and Lakeview has also been maintained so far (money from the general fund is required to cover the debt payments on new, and past, prison construction—currently amounting to \$50 million per year).

The Oregon DOC did make some cuts. Food costs, currently at \$2.88 per prisoner/day will decrease 20 percent further to \$2.30; this will save the department some \$4.5 million. Major cuts were made to health care for prisoners: medical services will be consolidated so that there is a central pharmacy, specialty services like dialysis will be located at only one institution and Registered Nurses will be replaced by Certified Medication aides. But so far, the Oregon Department of Corrections was cut much less severely than other state programs such as higher education. With a third special session expected in late May or early June, and a looming deficit projected for the next biennium, it's too soon to say how Oregon will respond to the spiraling costs of corrections in the long run.

Washington's budget situation is every bit as precarious as that of its neighbor to the south, and its unemployment rate has been second only to Oregon's. Even before the layoffs at Boeing, revenues were falling behind predictions by \$100 million in September. By Decem-

ber the state's budget had a shortfall of \$1.5 billion. The total budget is about \$22.8 billion so this is a hefty sum. There are overruns in Medicaid, corrections, fire fighting and K-12 education amounting to about \$300 million. Serious problems are expected for the remainder of fiscal 2002.

In September, Washington Governor

yond their Earned Early Release (EER) date are expected to be released. EER for property and drug offenses will likely change from a third to a half of time of time served. The DOC also proposed the reduction of sentences for some burglary crimes and, with some exceptions, the elimination of community supervision of offenders other than sex offenders not sentenced to prison. It is estimated these measures could reduce the prison population by over 1,800 by year-end 2003 and remove 53,000 of those under outside supervision from existing caseloads. In March, the Washington House of Representatives passed (and the Governor signed) sentencing reforms for drug offenders which are expected to reduce the cost of corrections (HB 2338).

The Washington DOC proposed to eliminate the supervision of offenders for legal financial obligations such as child support as well as pre-sentencing investigations (except for sex offenders); to reduce drug offender sentences; and to speed up early release for property and drug offenses.

Gary Locke directed six General Fund state agencies - among them the Department of Corrections - to prepare fifteen percent budget cuts in order to address the projected revenue shortfall. Consequently, the DOC prepared to reduce its budget by \$78.8 million. Its priority, according to a Washington DOC press release, will be the imprisonment and management of violent offenders and the reduction of the supervision of non-violent offenders. The DOC proposed to eliminate the supervision of offenders for legal financial obligations such as child support as well as pre-sentencing investigations (except for sex offenders); to reduce drug offender sentences; and to speed up early release for property and drug offenses. With some exceptions, the community supervision of low and medium risk offenders would be eliminated; and prisoners in certain categories who are be-

In conclusion while we are looking at the possibility of closing prisons in several states due to state budget problems, we are also facing the certainty of further severe cutbacks in education, vocational training, health care (particularly mental health care) and the quality and quantity of food served to prisoners. Cuts in outside supervision treatment, such as that provided in halfway houses, youth programs and parole and probation, are being used to justify the need to keep existing prisons and even to construct new ones. It is, a rocky path that lies ahead for those whose aim it is to end the warehousing of prisoners and to make the enforced separation of prisoners from his or her community a time for the rehabilitation and education necessary to return him or her as a productive member to that community.

Perpetual Prisoner Machine:

Prisons, Prisons & More Prisons

Oregon's major "public works" project over the last decade has been the building of prisons. In ten years, Oregon has added more than 7,000 prison beds, bringing it to a current capacity of over 11,000—a lot of prison beds for a state with less than 3.5 million people. At the same time, crime rates significantly declined (a decline which began several years before the introduction of harsher sentencing). And this huge growth in prisons continues unabated: the state is planning to build an additional six prisons within the next seven years, adding another 4,000 beds or more. Meanwhile, Oregon is in a state of fiscal crisis and for months has had the highest unemployment rates in the nation. All of this means less money in state coffers, and painful cuts are being made to K-12 education, higher education, and human services. One thing that has not been cut is the prison construction program.

The building of more prisons is just the tip of the iceberg of the corrections budget. Once the prisons are built and filled, the state must commit to much larger annual operating costs. Since the 1993-95 biennium, the Department of Corrections (DOC) operating budget has ballooned from \$377 million to just under \$1 billion. The DOC budget now surpasses the state budget for higher education and is poised to grow aggressively with the addition of new prisons. The argument has been made that protecting the entire public safety budget is essential to providing for community safety. The curious thing is, plenty of other public safety programs, including the state police, and all four rural forensics labs, have taken significant cuts. No, in Oregon it seems to be just the prison-building program that is sacred. What gives?

The Prison Build-up: Faster Than a Speeding Bullet

The main driver of the prison build-up in Oregon is the state's mandatory sentencing law (Measure 11), passed by voters in 1994. Promoted as a law to lock-up repeat, violent offenders (with a racially biased ad campaign that focused on "gang members"), Measure 11 related cases are now approximately half of all new commitments. Many people sentenced under Measure 11 are first-time offenders. What the campaign to pass Measure 11 failed to address was the huge cost to taxpayers of locking up thousands more individuals for much longer periods of time.

While the Governor and most legislators opposed the passage of Measure 11, they lost no time in cranking up the big prison-building campaign. In early 1996, Governor John Kitzhaber acknowledged in a public speech that "locating a prison facility can be akin to locating a toxic waste dump." Clearly, local communities might have strong feelings about being turned into prison towns. The state's solution? Move fast and site the prisons before broad community input could be heard. Declaring an emergency, the legislature passed "supersiting" legislation that allowed the state to site all new prisons without the usual land-use planning review. In less than six months in 1996, the state chose multiple sites.

Economic Development or Economic Disaster?

The increase in incarceration rates may have been the impetus for the prison-building boom, but state officials and elected leaders quickly put a new spin on it. Building a prison was presented as a good economic development strategy for struggling small towns (all but one of the prison sites are in economi-

cally depressed rural communities). The DOC sent brochures to small town governments emphasizing that they could provide full-time, family wage jobs with the new facilities (interestingly, the word "prison" was never used in the brochure). The brochure also stressed how good the "facilities" would be for local business: goods and supplies could be purchased from local vendors, local contractors could be used to provide education and counseling, there would be access to a low-cost workforce (prisoners) for community works projects, and opportunities for private industry to access labor (again, prisoners) for jobs that are difficult to fill.

Some local communities took the bait. Local politicians, desperate to see more jobs and in some cases seeing an opportunity for personal gain, expressed interest in having a prison come to town. Once these local governments expressed interest, the state juggernaut took over. In nearly every case, local residents did not know in advance that their local officials were inviting a prison to town. Once they found out and expressed their opposition, it was too late—the invitation had been made and from then on all decisions would be made by the state.

The question of whether or not the prisons will bring economic development has not been answered. But initial evidence, and comparisons with similar small towns in California that have been saddled with prisons over the past twenty years indicate that the long-term costs to the communities far outweigh the benefit. There are a few things we do know about the situation in Oregon that should be cause for alarm in any town selected for a prison.

The promise of local contracts to provide education and counseling services is false. The DOC is known for preferring to use its own people to pro-

Re-thinking Oregon's Prison Build-up

vide all services inside. That, combined with the cuts in services to prisoners, resulted in the elimination last year of nearly fifty teachers from the local community college who were hired to provide education services at the Ontario prison (the state's first big expansion project). So much for local contracts.

While towns may get a little money to improve local infrastructure (e.g. roads, water lines) needed for the prison, the long-term costs will burden local economies. For example, in Lakeview recent contracts with local government make plain that once the road improvements and water system for the prison are in place, it will be the local community's responsibility to maintain them in perpetuity. In addition, the DOC required in their contracts that they be the number one priority for use of water in the community, and for snow removal on the roads. So for a relatively modest amount of money and a few temporary local jobs, Lakeview has essentially signed away its water rights and placed local workers and families second to the prison when it comes to clearing the roads during the fierce winter storms that are common in that remote part of the state. And to top it all off, local taxpayers will pay for maintaining the roads and water services to the prison forever.

It is true that the DOC will provide an extremely low-cost prisoner work force to local governments and businesses—which could cut jobs for local residents. Current policy allows private businesses to hire a crew of ten prisoners for \$400 per day (the cost of providing a DOC supervisor for each crew). In rural communities where low-wage and seasonal jobs make up the bulk of local employment, the probability of increasing “free world” unemployment is high.

Playing Fast & Loose With Tax Dollars

State officials like to say that the money for building prisons is “other money,” implying that we shouldn't worry about how much we're spending. But as everyone knows, there is no such thing as a free lunch. This money doesn't drop from the sky. It comes in the form of “certificates of participation”, a type of bond that gets paid for out of the state's General Fund. In other words, Oregon's taxpayers are paying back the prison debt—currently to the tune of \$100 million in debt payments each biennium. With new construction, this will likely double. And this comes out of the same pot of money that's used to fund schools, healthcare, roads and other basic services. So the more money we tie up in prison debt, the less money is available for other programs.

Those initial bond sales, however, provided quite a windfall to the DOC. Since 1995, DOC has had over \$800 million

in bond money to play with. In fact, after construction of the new prisons in Umatilla and Wilsonville, it turned out that the DOC was sitting on about \$50 million they'd saved on those projects (money that, as recently as the spring of 2001, they did not acknowledge they had). That's quite a little slush fund. Given the state budget crisis and threatened cuts to their operating budget, the DOC offered up this money to offset program costs. So taxpayers will be footing the debt payments on this \$50 million for the next twenty-five years, but the money has been used to pay short-term, immediate expenses. And there is reason to wonder if there are additional pots of bond money sitting around. At a recent public meeting in Lakeview, DOC staff said they could fund a costly geothermal well project out of other “savings” they had on hand. Too bad the schools don't have money hidden away somewhere—they sure could use it right now.

What You Can Do:

If you'd like to keep informed about efforts to control corrections spending, sign-up for the Western Prison Project's Action Alert Network for Oregon (see page 23).

Other things you can do:

- Write your legislator and the Governor and express your views on the state's spending priorities. To find your legislator on the internet, go to: www.leg.state.or.us, or call the Capitol at 503-986-1384.
- Write a letter to your local paper and educate your fellow citizens on the issue.

Bucking the Trend & Moving Backward

Across the country, many states are finding themselves in the same tough economic situation. And the growth in corrections spending over the past decade has come under closer scrutiny as states are forced to make hard choices about scarce resources. But in Oregon, state leaders are looking firmly—backward. Meanwhile, more and more community advocates are starting to question the trade-off between prisons and other programs, and recent polling shows that an overwhelming majority of Americans believe that building more prisons does nothing to solve the problem of crime.

State Report:

Oregon's "No New Prisons" Campaign

A coordinated, statewide campaign to stop the building of new prisons in Oregon got underway last fall and has been gathering steam ever since. Coordinated by the Western Prison



Participants at "East Meets West" conference on rural prisons

Project and Oregon Criminal Justice Reform Coalition, the campaign has



Diana Adams, Lakeview Citizens Against the Prison, talks about why a majority of local citizens oppose the prison

brought together college students, criminal justice reform advocates, rural activists, members of the religious community and farmers and residents from two rural towns selected for new prisons.

The immediate aims of the campaign are: 1) to delay the sale of bonds for construction of new prisons in Lakeview and Madras this biennium—this saves millions of tax dollars imme-

diately; and 2) to influence the legislature to appoint a statewide, blue ribbon committee to examine Oregon's hodge-podge of sentencing laws and make recommendations for reforms that could save state money, protect public safety and end the need for new prisons.

While local opposition to the two prisons has existed since they were originally sited several years ago, the economic crisis in the state has given new momentum to the call for a moratorium on prison construction. And as deep budget cuts are made to education programs throughout the state, more and more people are questioning the ballooning cost of corrections in Oregon.

Brigette Sarabi, Western Prison Project Director, says that: "Oregon has clearly made a choice to build jails over educating our children. We'd like to suggest that this is 'dumb on crime'. All the research shows that quality education is the best crime prevention there is. There are reasonable steps the state could take to



Craig Gilmore talks about the reality of living in a California prison town

control the cost of Corrections, protect public safety, and save millions of tax dollars that could be better spent on education."



Mario Sifuentes, Oregon Students of Color Coalition, outlines higher education cuts

Over the past few months, the campaign has generated thousands of letters, emails, and phone calls to state leaders. In early February, on the first day of the first Special Session of the legislature, over 120 students, farmers and activists turned out for a rally on the steps of the state Capitol to get their message across. Waving signs that said "schools not jails" and "farms not jails", participants finished up by distributing packets of special candy



Ruth and Craig Gilmore, avid readers of WPP's "Justice Matters"

Oregon

hearts bearing campaign messages to every state legislator.

In March, the Western Prison Project sponsored “*East Meets West—Bridging the Divide to Halt New Rural Prisons in Oregon*,” a one-day strategy conference held in Eugene. Students, activists, and rural residents of the proposed prison towns gathered to learn more about the issues and make plans for pushing forward to stop the new prisons. Craig Gilmore from California Prison Moratorium Project, and Dr. Ruth Wilson Gilmore from the University of California at Berkeley were keynote speakers at the conference, and shared detailed information about the experience of California’s rural prison towns during the past twenty years. California’s rural prison towns have found that the promise of economic development for their communities was false, and most of these towns are worse off ten years after getting a prison.

Continuing its public education efforts, the Western Prison Project has



Over 120 people from around the state drove for hours to ask legislators to delay or stop new prisons

launched a “schools not prisons” billboard campaign in Portland to encourage voters to think about the trade-offs the state is making by continuing to invest in new prison construction at a time when the education budget is being radically cut. The three billboards, all in high traffic locations near downtown, were made possible by a generous donation from Art FX Murals.

As state leaders gear up for a third Special Session to make additional budget cuts, the Oregon Criminal Justice Reform Coalition

and its allies is launching another drive to get its message out to legislators. According to Coalition leaders: “The question is not ‘does Oregon need prisons?’ The question right now is ‘does Oregon need more prisons?’ Oregon taxpayers are already paying \$100

million each biennium in debt payments on the new prisons built in the last few years. In a time of fiscal crisis, we cannot afford to lock-up more general fund dollars for prison cells. We must look at moderate reforms to our criminal justice system that can save taxpayer dollars and still protect public safety.”



One of WPP's “schools not prisons” billboards goes up in downtown Portland



Madras residents Dotha & Jerry Patterson express their support for delaying prison bond sales



WPP Director Brigitte Sarabi checking out the creation of the billboard

Voter Organizing for Increased Civic Engagement

VOICE Project Launched

The Western Prison Project is launching a new, multi-state campaign to build political power and influence among ex-prisoners and their families. The VOICE (Voter Organizing For Increased Civic Engagement) Project will get underway



JoAnne Bowman, Program Director

in June, under the leadership of WPP Board member and former Oregon State Representative, JoAnn Bowman. The goal of the project is to help ex-prisoners reclaim their place as citizens by gaining and exercising their right to vote.

The project was inspired by the ground-breaking work of the NAACP during the 2000 election cycle, when they registered tens of thousands of people

Felony disenfranchisement has become a significant factor affecting the outcome of federal, state and local elections in the United States today. According to a recent study by sociologists from Northwestern University and the University of Minnesota, approximately 5 million American citizens are disenfranchised due to past felony convictions. The same study concludes that if felons had the vote, and voted in the way and at the rate of those who otherwise looked like them demographically and socio-economically, approximately 30% would have voted. More recently, many people believe that the felony disenfranchisement of an estimated 500,000 Florida citizens was a determining factor in the 2000 presidential election.

Because the majority of prisoners come from poor communities and/or communities of color, the lack of voting rights of prisoners has a disproportionate impact on the political power of these communities. By helping more former prisoners to exercise their

v o t i n g
r i g h t s , t h e
W e s t e r n

Prison Project hopes to build a broader base of voters interested in criminal justice reform and other policies that support healthy communities and the participation of all citizens in the democratic process.

JoAnn Bowman will be taking a leave of absence from her board position with the Western Prison Project to devote time to this project between June and November, 2002. JoAnn is a former democratic state representative from Portland, Oregon and served on the House Judiciary Committee. She has also been a leader in efforts to reform Measure 11 and the Police Accountability

Campaign in Portland. She is an activist in the NAACP and co-hosts a weekly radio talk show, "Voices from the Edge," with attorney Alan Graf. JoAnn will be targeting her efforts in Oregon, Washington and Nevada—the states in our region with the largest populations of former prisoners—but will also be available to work with allies in other states who want to participate in the VOICE project.

For more information about the VOICE project, contact the Western Prison Project office. And stay tuned for the bumper stickers: "Ex-Con & I Vote!"

EX-CON AND I VOTE



incarcerated in jails throughout the South (people in jail who have not yet been convicted still retain the right to vote). In our region, there are at least a quarter million ex-prisoners who have voting rights, or could soon regain them. Through the VOICE Project, the Western Prison Project will work with partner groups in our seven-state region to reach out to former prisoners and their families with voter registration and education activities. The project will also work with Departments of Corrections and parole and probation offices to increase prisoners' access to voting rights information.

Thank You

Western Prison Project would like to thank the following for their support:

Art FX Murals
McKenzie River Gathering Foundation
Ms. Foundation: Democracy Funding Circle
Peace Development Fund
RESIST
Unitarian Universalist Veatch Program at Shelter Rock
Norman Foundation
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Wayne Morse Center for Law & Politics

And the many individuals who have become members of the Western Prison Project

Eye on Injustice

Race & Incarceration in the Northwest—A Stark Divide

A new report by Human Rights Watch demonstrates that the issue of criminal justice reform is directly linked to the need for racial justice. In this region, with its majority white population, it's sometimes possible to see these as separate issues. But this report "*Race & Incarceration in the United States*" (Human Rights Watch, February, 2002), makes clear that racism plays out in very real ways within the criminal justice system throughout the country, including the Pacific Northwest.

Oregon has the highest rate of incarceration for African Americans in the Northwest. If you are an African American in Oregon, you are 8 times more likely to be incarcerated than if you are white. If you are an African American woman, it's even worse—you are 9 times more likely to be incarcerated than a white woman. And African American youth? They are being locked up at a rate 10 times higher than white youth. Thanks to these mind-boggling differences in incarceration rates, 11% of Oregon's prisoners are African Americans, even though African Americans make up less than 2% of the state's population.

The situation in Washington state is hardly better. African Americans are slightly over 3% of Washington's

population, but they make up 18% of the state's prisoners. That means that if you are an African American in Washington, you are 7 times more likely to be locked-up than if you are white; and African American kids under the age of 18 are 8 times more likely to be incarcerated than white kids.



Other states in our region also show shocking racial disparities in the rate at which they lock up African Americans and other people of color. In Montana, African Americans are 8.7 times more likely to be incarcerated than whites; in Utah the rate is 9.5 times higher, and in Nevada the rate is 5 times higher. Throughout the region, the rate of incarceration for Latinos versus whites ranges from 1.6 times higher in Oregon to 3.3 times higher in Montana.

These statistics reveal the continuing, stark disparity in the rate of

incarceration for people of color compared to whites throughout the region. And while we have choices as states in the ways we promote healthy communities and protect public safety, these numbers show that the choices we have made have been at a high cost to our communities of color.

Nationwide, 63% of prisoners are African American or Latino, even though together they are only 25% of the population. Clearly, the prison boom in the U.S. has disproportionately locked up people of color. According to Human Rights Watch: "The high and disproportionate rate of minority incarceration in the U.S., particularly that of blacks, is a grave challenge to the country. Last year, the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights warned that racial inequalities in the criminal justice system threatened to negate fifty years of hard-fought civil rights progress...[R]acial bias or

sheer indifference to the fate of minority communities has surely contributed to the development and persistence of such racially disparate rates of incarceration."

For activists, what does all this mean? In a nutshell, anyone who cares about racial equality must be concerned with the criminal justice system; and anyone who cares about criminal justice reform must be equally committed to racial justice.

Graphic by Matt Wuerker

Regional Conference:

Activists Meet in Utah for Third Regional Conference

Dozens of grassroots, criminal justice reform activists from throughout our region met in Salt Lake City in April for the third annual Regional Conference for Criminal Justice Reform, sponsored by the Western Prison Project. Activists—including many former prisoners and family members of prisoners—came from Oregon, Washington, Idaho, Utah, Montana and Nevada. They were joined by special guests from New York and Washington, D.C. for a weekend dedicated to sharing information, skills and

ways as volunteers—Western Prison Project wanted to offer an opportunity for some of the women we'd been working with the past few years to gather together and explore ways to strengthen their individual leadership. This special training was facilitated by Guadalupe Guajardo



Oregon and Montana participants share strategies



WPP Board Member Anthony Davis (R) with Margo from J.E.D.I. Women, a new member group of the regional coalition

strategies for strengthening criminal justice reform efforts.

A one-day, leadership development institute was held for fifteen grassroots women leaders from throughout the region the day before the conference began. Because the vast major-



WPP's Brigitte Sarabi with Steve Ericson (L) and Rob Jensen (R) from Utah's Citizens Education Project - our regions' leading anti-private prison activists

ity of grassroots, criminal justice reform efforts are led by women—almost all

of the Portland-based Technical Assistance for Community Services. An expert in the field of transformative leadership, Guadalupe encouraged participants to rethink our definition of leadership and hone our critical thinking skills.

On Saturday morning, activists shared updates on hot criminal justice issues in each of the states represented. Everyone was thrilled to meet incredible activists from

Montana and Nevada who came to the conference for the first time, and the strong Utah contingent in attendance



Cassandra Villanueva from Oregon's Latinos Unidos Siempre (L) and WPP's Kathleen Pequeño

made great strides in creating plans for more coordinated, statewide work. All of the Oregon groups in attendance are members of the Oregon Criminal Justice Reform Coalition, and they were able to share both success stories and tips for building a statewide coalition. Prison Legal News, one of the leading activist groups in Washington, once again provided solid information and generously shared resources with others present.

Prison Activism Now!

In the afternoon, Laura Sager, Executive Director of Families Against Mandatory Minimums (FAMM) in Washington, D.C., led an intensive community activist training workshop to help participants build skills in media outreach, public education, and strategic action-planning.

Saturday night, Western Prison Project



Laura Sager, FAMM Executive Director (right, preparing to lead a workshop)

sponsored a special film screening of "Corrections," a documentary film about the private prison industry and the increasing profits being reaped from the prison boom in the U.S. Ashley Hunt, who made the film, flew in from Louisiana Saturday morning to join us for the conference and present the film to an audience of over 100 at the University of Utah that night. Following the film, Ashley rushed-off to catch a flight to New York, but Kevin Pranis from the "Not With Our



Filmmaker Ashley Hunt (L) with Brigette Sarabi

Money Campaign," (based in New York), continued the conversation with the audience by sharing information about the nationwide, campus campaign to stop prison privatization.

The whirlwind of activity over the conference weekend also included some less structured activities, like sharing meals, hanging out and talking at the hostel where most out-of-towners were staying,



Burt Stringfellow from Utah FAMM and other members of the Utah contingent



Women prison activists in WPP's pre-conference leadership development institute

and evening explorations of downtown Salt Lake.

After all this information sharing, training, and social events, member groups of the Western Criminal Justice Reform Coalition were still able to meet for several hours on Sunday to move forward with Coalition plans to elect an Executive Committee and begin exploring multi-state campaigns on criminal justice issues. The Coalition, which was formed at last year's regional conference, now has twenty-six member organizations from throughout the region.

A full report on the conference will be available to our members in early June. Please write Western Prison Project if you would like a copy.



Special Focus:

Prison Activism & Spirituality

Brigette Sarabi, editor

In this issue, we've chosen to focus on spirituality by sharing articles that come from three spiritual traditions: Native American, Christianity, and Buddhism. There are, of course, many wonderful spiritual traditions available to all of us. But these articles are a start, and they were all written or compiled by people we deeply respect—people who are well aware of the realities of a prisoner's life.

Most of us involved in the Prison Project, activists that we are, draw from a variety of spiritual traditions to help us keep strong and centered in our work. Speaking personally, I know that I am more effective, more compassionate, and more energized for the work that needs to be done when I make a place for the spiritual in my life.

I recently had the experience of being in a training session with a politically and spiritually radical Catholic nun who asked a key question: do we want to educate for liberation, or for domestication?

"I left prison more informed than when I went in."

At the Western Prison Project we strive to educate ourselves, and those we work with, for liberation. One of my heroes, a man who has inspired so many of us to fight for social justice, is Nelson Mandela. To me, he combines the power of dedicated political activism and a deep and compassionate spirituality. He is truly a man whose whole life is an example of "education for liberation."

Working with prisoners, I often think of Mandela. He spent 27 years in prison, and was finally released at the age of 71 as South Africa's anti-human political system of apartheid finally toppled. A

year ago, Oprah Winfrey published an interview with Mandela that I tore out of the magazine and have kept with me. I read it every now and then when I need a little spiritual support, and I want to share some of it with our readers.

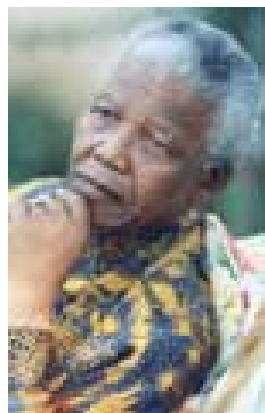
In talking about how prison changed him, Mandela said: "In a single cell in prison, I had time to think. I had a clear view of my past and present, and I found that my past left much to be desired, both in regard to my

relations with other humans and in developing personal worth...It was only when I was in jail that I wondered, What happened to so-and-so? Why didn't I go back and say thank you? I had become very small and had not behaved like a human who appreciates hospitality and support. I decided that if I ever got out of prison, I would make it up to

those people or to their children and grandchildren. That is how I was able to change my life—by knowing that if somebody does something good for you, you have to respond."

When asked if he came out of prison a wiser man, Mandela said: "All I can say is that I was less foolish than I was when I went in. I equipped myself by reading literature, especially classic novels such as *The Grapes of Wrath*. When I closed that book, I was a different man. It enriched my powers of thinking and discipline, and my relationships. I left prison more informed than when I went in. And the more informed you

are, the less arrogant and aggressive you are. In my younger days, I was arrogant—jail helped me to get rid of it."



Nelson Mandela

And when asked if he believes people are good at their core, Mandela had no doubts. "There is no doubt whatsoever, provided you are able to arouse the goodness inherent in every human. Those of us in the fight against apartheid changed many people who

hated us because they discovered that we respected them...You must understand that individuals get caught up in the policy of their country. In prison, for instance, a warden or officer is not promoted if he doesn't follow the policy of the government—though he himself does not believe in that policy."

Being in prison, and to a lesser extent working from the outside to improve prison conditions or confront injustice in the criminal justice system, are both guaranteed to put us in touch with our anger and rage. The question is, what do we do with this anger? This special section gives us some possible answers.





Spirituality

Prison Dharma

By Venerable Thubten Chodron

Here in this barbed wire monastery, we have the same situations arising every day, every instant. People who lack awareness or education, or communication skills, or upbringing, or morality, do things to themselves and to others which affect those who are confined in the small area with them. We are a part of those confined in that small area. Do we react with anger, with malice, with greed and envy? Or do we find ways to diffuse the problem? Do we act and think and speak in ways that continue to perpetuate the patterns of hurt and harm or do we convey methods of cessation? - Ohio prisoner and student of Ven. Thubten Chodron, on practicing the Dharma from inside the walls.

Recently, I went to visit James, a prisoner in Ohio with whom I've been corresponding. He had initially arranged for me to give a talk to the Buddhist group as well as to a large assembly of men, but unexpectedly he was thrown in "the hole," the "punishment quarters" in which the men are locked in a dingy two-person cell for all but an hour a day. If I was to see him now, it would have to be on a clergy visit, and according to prison rules, I could not do that and be a volunteer who gave a talk to an assembly at the same time. Thus, the talks unfortunately had to be canceled (Did you really think prison rules were to help the men?).

As it turned out, two days before my visit, the assistant warden told the officers in "the hole" to let James out as he hadn't done anything to merit being there to start with! So we met in an attorney's room, a stark white room with a round table and blue chairs, off the general visiting room, for four hours on a Sunday morning. James continues with his daily meditation practice and Dharma studies, as well as tries to practice in daily

life—not easy in a prison environment, where hostility is the norm and violence is frequent. Last year he took the eight precepts for life, and keeping them has helped him tremendously. (*editor's note: the eight precepts are: correct action, correct speech, correct livelihood, correct view, correct mindfulness, correct meditation, correct intention, and correct effort*). Our correspondence continued throughout the year: I send him questions to contemplate, he writes his reflections, and I comment on them.

For several months, he has been asking me to do the aspiring and engaging bodhisattva ceremonies during this visit. So that morning, we discussed the motivation for taking the bodhisattva precepts and went through the root precepts, discussing their implications in daily life. (*editor's note: a bodhisattva is a person who has compassionately vowed to achieve buddhahood but has not yet done so; in all forms of Buddhism, the bodhisattva works for the welfare of others*). Then we did the ceremonies in the attorney room, with him kneeling on a gray blanket on the floor and me sitting in a chair. Forget about setting up an altar, but the Buddhas and bodhisattvas were there for sure! Those of you who have taken bodhisattva precepts with me before will be happy to know that I made it through the ceremony without crying. (A crying nun was all the prison guards needed!)

While we were doing the ceremony, things felt "normal," but afterwards when I considered what had happened, I was amazed. Imagine trying to generate even the slightest bodhicitta (*editor's note: the intention to become fully enlightened in order to benefit others*) in a prison environment. It's similar to generating it in hell! I felt profoundly thankful for the opportunity to be there.

After our time together ended, James returned to the compound, while I waited for a guard to escort me out. Then, his mother came into the visiting room. Since he had left the room already, a guard arranged for him to meet us at the gate as we left the visiting room. There he was, standing behind a huge metal gate with enormous bars. He bent over and kissed his mother through the bars and then we turned to walk away. My last image was of him behind the gate looking at two people he cared about leaving. My first thought was, "How sad," but reconsidering and knowing James as I do, I knew that wasn't his feeling at all. He was feeling very full and grateful as he watched us depart. He rejoiced at what he had, rather than lamented that it was over. If only the rest of us could do that with the good things in our lives!

Venerable Thubten Chodron is a Seattle-based Buddhist nun of the Tibetan tradition, who has worked with prisoners around the country. She began working with prisoners several years ago, offering teachings via correspondence, and has traveled to several prisons to lead teachings with her students. The following is an excerpt from an essay she wrote in 2000, describing the exceptional experience of leading teachings with prisoners from inside the walls. The prisoners' name has been changed at his request. Tara Herivel, 2002





Special Focus:

Spirituality from the Inside

By Sonny Boyd

I have been incarcerated for approximately 15 years straight. I first entered prison in 1987 in Salem, Oregon. My Native spiritual life was very limited upon entering prison. When I arrived I was young and full of negative thinking. I thought I'd be living in the "hole" for fighting around. I really believed that this was the way a warrior was supposed to be, inside or outside. Now, having my life literally taken away and put inside of this warehouse, I have opened my eyes and realized how sacred a life really is. I never in my entire growing up wanted to become an inmate. I really thought and believed that the Creator had something else in store for me. The choices that the Creator has given us in life are very difficult to determine. Some of us make good choices, some of us bad choices. I think this is why some of us are incarcerated to balance out our lives.

Spirituality is something we all have. It is entirely up to us if we choose to acknowledge it. To me, there are many good and bad spirits traveling throughout our existence. What I mean is this: I can be having a very good day and all of a sudden, someone can say or do something and I can get upset over it, and yet I recognize myself getting upset over nothing. So I thank the Creator for giving me knowledge to recognize such things. This also tells me I need to work on myself in that area. This is the best example I can give you on bad spirits traveling around us. The spirit I have in me let's me observe everyone and everything around me. This spirit let's me recognize things I'd like to bring into my life. For example, if I meet someone and they have very good speaking qualities, I myself would like to be able to speak with good qualities. I would like

to give another example. I can meet someone very special in my life (my wife), and just by meeting her I get some energy so strong that I change things in my life for the better.

Now this spirit I have is the same spirit. I could have changed things in my life on my own, or I could have tried and said to myself "come on spirit, let's get motivated and change myself." But we know it isn't that easy. So how can it be so easy for an individual to come into our lives and change us so much? Answer: this is the mystery of the spiritual world. I accept it as a reward the Creator has given to me. All of us can get these same rewards from the Creator as long as we believe.

I meet many different tribal members, and even though some are not enrolled, they are all Natives. So as I meet all these people, I come across some of them who have striking resemblances to some of our ancient ancestors. And when I see this, I voice it to the people and I let them know that this is how we keep our traditional ancestors' beliefs alive.

I myself am in the learning process of becoming a spiritual person. But I know if someone was truly spiritual he or she would have to be able to handle many tests from many different people, and this can be a very hurtful experience. A truly spiritual person does not need to be victorious. He or she doesn't dictate to other people on what to do or how. A spiritual person doesn't play games with other people's lives. A spiritual person doesn't go around bragging about how much he or she knows. A spiritual person thinks of other people before him or herself. A spiritual person can tell you good, funny stories and none of the story puts anyone to shame. A spiritual person, if asked how much

he or she knows, the reply will be "not very much." Just by speaking to a spiritual person you can tell and feel good from the energy these people put out. And there are a lot of them around us. I have major respect for a lot of people of many different races.

In giving out respect, you get respect in return. And this goes along with bad feelings. What we give out is what we receive back. In closing this up I'd like to say that the Creator loves us all and he gives us teachings every day, every moment, and every second of our lives. We all can be who we want to be. We have this spiritual power inside of us. I hope and pray that no one learns the hard way of life, by having your life taken away as I have. I had to learn and I am still learning.

I would like to give some shout-outs to some special people who help me with my struggle, and thanks, to: the newsletter of the Western Prison Project; my wife Darlene Crazybull and kids Sheila, Chris, Lil Sonny and Kristina; my brothers Stuart and Snoops Crazybull; Pilar; Yona; Doug and Diana; Maxine Krueger; Ron Hipp; Sissy; all the volunteers of the D.O.C.; and all the brothers who are incarcerated and in segregation. I pray that the Creator makes our struggles in life a little easier. Aho Mitakyyo Owasin
All My Relations

My name is William James Boyd/Sonny Crazybull. I am an enrolled tribal member of the Fort Peck, Assiniboine and Sioux tribes of Poplar, Montana. My band affiliation is Sisseton-Wahpeton, Dakota Nation. My parents are Maxine Babe Crazybull and Tony Diaz-Crazybull. I lost my mother this past September. I pray that the Creator will see to her safe journey to the spiritual world.



Spirituality

The Practice of Christianity

By Steve Reimer

Christianity begins with the recognition of our need for Christ and then continues with our search to be more like Him. It addresses the triune (three-part) being, which God created in each of us, similar to His own (in His image). What are those three parts?

First, we are created with a spirit, the only eternal part of our being. This is the part designed to relate to our Maker. Second, we are given a soul with which to think; with the capacity to reason. Then third, we are given a physical body whose purpose is to carry out the commands of our every thought. Each of these created parts—body, soul and spirit—has a need for fulfillment, a need for nourishment (food). If you or I decided to starve our body, soul or spirit, we would suffer serious life-or-death consequences. But if we treat each part as intended by our Maker and feed each part with foods designed by Him to nourish, then life, health and well-being should be expected.

Christ answered for us the questions of how this three-part person should act, talk and walk. Just as we consult a manufacturer's handbook for how to treat (drive, care for, and maintain) an automobile, so we must consult the "Manufacturer's Handbook" (the Bible) for how to treat (act, talk, and walk) our person, as well as the persons of others around us.

So just what are the right foods? Well, for the body, science and technology have combined quite nicely to answer this question. For the soul, the study of psychology has attempted to answer the question, but in so many ways has erred as it leaves out the all-important God-component. Our "Manufacturer" never designed our emotional and mental capacities to filter through the daily bombardment and steady stream of

harshness we are fed through all forms of media and our present-day culture. The "Manufacturer's Handbook" addresses these topics. As to our spiritual component, the "Manufacturer's Handbook" speaks clearly about how life as we presently know it is simply a preparation for life beyond the confines of our present body and time—in eternity.

For the inmate, nothing could possibly prepare a "first-timer" for the realities of life behind bars. Further complicating matters, under our current system of justice, little is done to prepare (rehabilitate, retrain, and restore) the inmate for life beyond bars once he or she has served his or her debt to society. The results of these failures, for either the newly imprisoned inmate or the newly released inmate, are devastating. I have personally seen the results of what happens to the newly imprisoned inmate who has lost all hope for living. Or who decides that its easier to "join 'em than to resist," when it comes to the toughened and callused inmate population. All of us have seen the statistics of what happens to the recently paroled, as they struggle with the various vices that produced the behaviors that placed them behind bars in the first place. We've seen loved ones return to the system again and again because they cannot seem to break free of unhealthy behavior. However, regardless of whether or not our society recognizes and changes its laws to reflect a true spirit of the restoration spoken of in the Bible, we can still carry such a spirit within us. It is within the "Manufacturer's Handbook" that we discover how. *Steve Reimer is the Associate Pastor of the Life Change Christian Center in Portland, Oregon. He is also actively involved in the Oregon Criminal Justice Reform Coalition.*

Tao Te Ching

The following are quotes from an English translation of the Tao Te Ching by Ursula LeGuin. According to LeGuin: "It is the most lovable of all the great religious texts, funny, keen, kind, modest, indestructibly outrageous, and inexhaustibly refreshing. Of all the deep springs, this is the purest water."

Everybody says my way is great but improbable.
All greatness is improbable.
What's probable is tedious and petty.

Knowing other people is intelligence
Knowing yourself is wisdom.
Overcoming others takes strength
Overcoming yourself takes greatness.
Contentment is wealth.
Boldly pushing forward takes resolution.
Staying put keeps you in position.
To live till you die
Is to live long enough.

To have without possessing
Do without claiming
Lead without controlling;
This is mysterious power.

Resources

Buddhist Resources

There are a growing number of organizations and individuals leading Buddhist teachings with prisoners. The following lists just a few such organizations, who may be able to help put you in contact with practitioners in your area.

Thubten Chodron & the Dharma Friendship Organization, Seattle, WA:

Thubten Chodron's organization, the Dharma Friendship Organization, regularly corresponds with prisoners and provides teachings. (go to "Prison Dharma" and related links.)

Prison Dharma Network:

A project to assist individual prisoners with developing skills to meet the everyday violence in prison, and life after release from prison.

PO Box 4623, Boulder CO 80306.

Phone: 303-544-5923 E-mail: website: <http://www.prisondharmanetwork.org/contact.html>

Buddhist Peace Fellowship:

A nonsectarian Buddhist support network for prisoners, prison volunteers, and correctional workers founded in 1989 by Fleet Maull, a then federal prisoner in the U.S. PO Box 4650, Berkeley, CA 94704. Phone: 510-655-6169 Email: bpf@bpf.org www.bpf.org/prison.html

Human Kindness Foundation

Prison-Ashram Project:

Founded by Bo Lozoff and Ram Dass in 1973 to inspire and encourage prisoners and prison staff to recognize their depth as human beings, and to behave accordingly. PO Box 61619, Durham, NC 27715. Phone: (919) 304-2220 <http://www.humankindness.org/project.html>

Spirituality Resources

Books

The Message version of the Bible
Our Daily Bread by RBC Ministries
Seventy Times Seven and Beyond by Monty Christensen. A book about forgiveness and second chances.

Pilgrim's Progress, in Today's English by John Bunyan as retold by James Thomas, about the dreams of an eighteenth-century inmate.

The Chronicles of Narnia by C.S. Lewis.

Lao Tzu Tao Te Ching Ursula K. LeGuin, Shambhala Books, 1997

Recommended Web Sites for Prison Activists & Researchers

Washington Criminal Justice Reform Network: www.reformnetwork.org

Prison Activist Resource Center: www.prisonactivist.org

Criminal Justice Initiative of the Open Society Institute: www.soros.org/crime/

Prison Policy Initiative: www.prisonsucks.com (this site is arguably the best source of current research data on a variety of prison issues)

Families Against Mandatory Minimums: www.famm.org

Critical Resistance: www.criticalresistance.org

Western Prison Project: www.westernprisonproject.org

Departments of Corrections in our Region:

Montana Department of Corrections: <http://www.cor.state.mt.us/css/default.asp>

Idaho Department of Corrections: <http://www.corr.state.id.us/>

Nevada Department of Corrections: <http://www.ndoc.state.nv.us>

Washington Department of Corrections: <http://www.wa.gov/doc/doc.htm>

Oregon Department of Corrections: <http://www.doc.state.or.us/>

Utah Department of Corrections: <http://www.cr.ex.state.ut.us/>

Wyoming Department of Corrections: <http://doc.state.wy.us/corrections.html>



Reader Survey

What Would You Do?

Throughout the country, states are locking-up more and more of their budgets for corrections. This is forcing cuts to basic services like education, healthcare, and other human services. We'd like to ask our readers, especially prisoners, to give serious thought to the question:

How can we control the cost of Corrections and still assure the community that we are responsibly addressing concerns about public safety?

We invite our readers to send us their answers to this question (please keep it to two pages or less). We promise to read all letters, and to compile a list of the best ideas and forward these ideas to other criminal justice reform organizations, as well as the media and elected leaders.

We believe that the people most affected by a problem or issue are the best people to come up with a solution. Please share your ideas with us. Send them to: Western Prison Project,

Attention: Reader Survey,
P.O. Box 40085, Portland, OR 97240.

Join Us!

Yes, I want to be a member of the Western Prison Project!

Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____ E-Mail: _____

Memberships: \$15.00 basic membership, \$7.00 prisoner membership

____ Sign me up for the Action Alert Network (Oregon only)

____ I want to become a member. Enclosed is my membership donation of: \$ ____

Note: If you are a prisoner or a family member of a prisoner living in our region and you can't afford to make a membership donation, you can still become a member and receive "Justice Matters" just by writing to us and requesting a membership.

The Western Prison Project depends upon memberships and donations to operate. Thank you for your support!
Send memberships and contributions to: Western Prison Project, P.O. Box 40085, Portland, OR 97240-0085.

Take Action! 5 Things You Can Do:

Take the **reader survey** (page 23) and share your ideas on controlling the costs of corrections

Take a stand for racial justice! Read the **Human Rights Watch Report on Race and Incarceration** in the U.S. (<http://hrw.org/backgrounders/usa/race/>) and contact your local newspaper and your legislators to educate them on racial disparities in the prison system.

Join one of the grassroots criminal justice reform groups in your state - volunteer, attend a meeting, make a donation. Contact Western Prison Project (or go to our web site at www.westernprisonproject.org) to find a list of groups in your state.

Support Oregon's **Schools Not Prisons** campaign (pages 10-14) by signing up for the Action Alert Network (page 23).

Register to Vote and get involved in the VOICE Project (page 14). Contact WPP for more details.

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Portland, OR 97240-0085

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