

Anti-Prison

Bureau of Public Secrets

Nothing exemplifies the sickness and degradation of the present society more than its “criminal justice” system, a cold-blooded infliction of suffering on a scale that far surpasses whatever offenses its victims may have been guilty of.

Think how long an hour can seem if you’re caught in some boring or frustrating situation. Then imagine being locked away not for an hour, or a day, or a week, but for years in a mean, ugly, hopeless environment administered by guards and officials who are in many cases more vicious and mentally sick than most of your fellow prisoners, who themselves may not be the most charming or uplifting of companions. And to add to the torment, knowing that a considerable portion of the people on the outside have been led to believe that you are being “coddled,” and that “light” sentences of “only” a few years amount to “getting off easy”

Meanwhile, in the name of cutting government expenses, demagogic politicians slash modest social programs that might provide at least some “at-risk” young people with alternatives to poverty and despair, while simultaneously supporting what amounts to an immense government subsidy of lifelong slave labor in the modernized gulags they are spending billions of dollars to build. This trend is developing its own self-perpetuating momentum, reinforcing and being reinforced by those who have a vested interest in the rapidly expanding “prison-industrial complex.”

Even supposing that these gulags actually reduced crime or rehabilitated criminals (they do neither), they are a crime against humanity. If a social system can function only at the cost of making the lives of millions of people a living hell, I say to hell with that system.

It doesn’t have to be that way. A liberated society could easily do away with the whole prison system. The vast majority of crimes are directly or indirectly related to money and property and would become meaningless with the elimination of capitalism.

Communities would then be free to experiment with various methods for dealing with the rare anti-social acts that might still occur. I don’t claim that there would be no problems, only that there would be far fewer problems than there are now, when people who happen to find themselves at the bottom of an absurd social order are harshly punished for their crude efforts to escape while those at the top loot the planet with impunity

Even within the present society, it would be possible to immediately free all the prisoners who are incarcerated for “victimless crimes” (drug use, consensual sex); to significantly reduce the prison terms for most other crimes; to emphasize rehabilitation rather than punishment; to improve prison conditions; and to eliminate all forms of physical and psychological torture; as well as to equalize the laws and their enforcement. We rarely see the law-and-order demagogues do anything serious to crack down on bank fraud, political bribery, false advertising, real estate speculation, labor exploitation, war profiteering, or environmental destruction, to say nothing of the mass murderers who run many of the world’s states. If such people were jailed as readily as petty thieves, prison conditions would be improved soon enough.

There are many forms of engagement which I encourage you to consider:

- Help prisoners directly (corresponding with them, sending them money, books and other needed supplies, helping with their legal cases).
- Take part in volunteer projects to teach prisoners to read, to meditate or otherwise improve their lives while they're incarcerated and to prepare them for when they get out.
- Help them make the transition when they get out.
- Support movements to free political prisoners, including the obscure as well as the famous.
- Work to repeal draconian laws and to undermine the irrational witch-hunting mindsets against scapegoats ("terrorists," "drug fiends," "child molesters") that tend to encourage such laws.
- Work with Amnesty International or other watchdog groups to pressure authorities to abandon torture and other inhumane practices.
- Make others aware of the hellishness of prison conditions and of the insidious power of the prison-industrial complex.
- Challenge the social system that produces all these horrors.

In order to avoid burnout, I recommend focusing on one or two anti-prison projects that particularly appeal to you. If you do not feel like taking part personally, consider contributing to others who are doing so. A list of anti-prison resources can be found at www.bopsecrets.org/anti-prison.htm

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