

VOICES From Behind WISCONSIN PRISON GATES

Issue 2, September 2016



“Changes need to be made throughout the system, and for that to happen we all need to come together.”

—Incarcerated Worker at Fox Lake Correctional Institute

The State of Wisconsin has capitalized off of incarcerating inmates—this includes the county jails, the courts and the prisons. It is no secret that D.O.C. is a billion dollar business—we are an assembly line to them...

The prisons would cease to function without the collective effort of the inmates. If all the inmates refused to work statewide, the Wisconsin prison system would die. Unless we push D.O.C. until their backs are to the wall, they will continue with their capitalizing scheme.”

—Incarcerated Worker at Dodge Correctional Institute

“Prison doesn’t stop a person from being a human being. Some of the greatest people in this world have been incarcerated.”

—Incarcerated Worker at Columbia Correctional Institute

AN INJURY TO ONE

This is a newsletter for people incarcerated in Wisconsin, based as much as possible



on what they are saying. It is edited and printed by the Milwaukee branch of the Industrial Workers of the World, Incarcerated Workers Organizing Committee. Please write us back if you have updates you’d like to give to people on the inside and the outside. The more that people talk together the less isolated we are. We are in contact with networks of prisoners areas outside of Wisconsin, and can help build those connections. Let us know if there are other people inside jails and prisons that we should contact. Besides the voices we quote here, the Milwaukee IWW is also helping groups at Waupun, Columbia and Green Bay Correctional with specific issues. Let us know if you want to hear more about these issues. Write to IWW: PO Box 342294, Milwaukee, WI, 53214

IS AN **INJURY** TO ALL

“Prison in Wisconsin is constructed to systematically break and destroy us mentally, emotionally, spiritually, morally, religiously, ethically, racially, socially!”

—Incarcerated Worker at Wisconsin Secure Program Facility (Boscobel)

“The masses have been conditioned to think that once that ‘convicted felon’ stamp has been applied to me, you, whoever, we’re scum of the earth.”

—Incarcerated Worker at Wisconsin Secure Program Facility (Boscobel)

“Not only do you provide a medium for inmates to voice their concerns, but to an unquestionable degree, you empower us to become responsible for our future. But most importantly, you raise the awareness of the public to those issues that has a tendency to make our life unique as a human experience.”

—Incarcerated Worker at Fox Lake Correctional Institute



Working Class Solidarity Against Prison Slavery

Voices from Fox Lake Correctional Institute:

“The situation here at Fox lake is best compared to an accident looking for a place to happen. The water is bad. It contains both lead and copper in amounts that exceed the federal guidelines. The staff don’t drink the water. They bring bottled water to work with them. The food is not much better. There are a lot of health issues here at Fox Lake, with some inmates experiencing various illnesses from cancers to heart issues.”

“If they take your job, you have to wait 90 days before you can apply for another job, plus they make you stay in your room until 4:30 pm every day. And you are allowed one recreation period each day. So, to lose a job is to add insult to injury. So, some inmates have taken to brown nosing to keep their jobs.”

“Another dilemma that we are faced with is how the DOC has, literally, thousands of inmates detained on allegations alone as the result of being charged with a crime, but once the charges have been exonerated the client is stuck serving a revocation without a conviction.”

“As for the drinking water, I’ve just exhausted my administrative remedies and plan to file my suit after my release because the DOC has become so bogus that they outright deprive one of access to the courts, not caring any longer about lawsuits.”

“We are not given enough meat as required, but rather a lot of soybeans, which leads me to believe that staff is stealing big time. They are always talking cut backs, but the only thing they are cutting back on is prisoner needs.”

“Words cannot express all that I’ve witnessed, experienced, lost, had done to me and will never regain.”

—Incarcerated Worker at Wisconsin Secure Program Facility (Boscobel)

“Due to me being a transgender woman in prison my daily life can sometimes be hard to the point where I’d want to kill myself. I go through a lot of BS with the staff and some inmates with them calling me nasty derogatory names and discriminating against me...I’ve filed civil action lawsuits against the DOC and WSPF employees for inadequate mental health treatment/care, emotional distress, cruel and usual punishment, discrimination, retaliation, harassment, torture, sexual harassment, mental anguish, deliberate indifference.”

—Incarcerated Worker at Wisconsin Secure Program Facility (Boscobel)

Voices from Waupun Correctional Institute:

“If you notice, health care is a major problem! And remember, they’re told to either stop giving that medical or try something else. Cheaper of course! I feel like a guinea pig!”

“Saturday and Sunday I got force fed. They stuck a tube up my nose and force fed me. I believe this retaliatory treatment will continue until they break us. But in order to break me its going to take more than putting tubes down my nose and sending guards to my cell to harass me.

“We’ve lost Tuesday and Wednesday visiting days. The visiting room is cold in the winter and hot in the summer. Our visitors are routinely harassed because a lot of the officers are unprofessional or have poor people skills. There’s no reason for the visitors to be sweating on a visit when the officer part of the building is air conditioned.”

“Administrative Confinement was a CONSTANT threat they used to discourage that stuff. So now everyone is either scared to blink, or they don’t know what they’ve allowed themselves to conform to being mistreated.”

“Lockdowns happen often here. They’ve only made the public aware of like 3 lockdowns since I been here —since 2004. Since 2014, December, there’s been at least 9 lockdowns. It can last from 1-21 days, no inmate movement, including cell hall inmate workers. We don’t get showers or phone usage.”

“At one point we were told that we would be getting water in the bottle because the water in the building I work in was so and still is so bad that you can smell the metal in it.”



“Guys in seg. said the guards gassed inmate Francisco Flores-Ramos. Ramos later died of being gassed. Ramos was placed in set a week earlier because he stabbed 3 staff member. Given the news coverage of this incident, Ramos should have been transferred out of this institution. Given the quick conclusion by the sheriff’s department statement that this incident does not seem to be suspicious, it raises serious questions as to the integrity of the investigative process.”

—Incarcerated worker at Green Bay Correctional Institute

Excerpts from *Incarcerated Worker*, Issue 3, Winter 2016. A project of the national IWW sent to incarcerated workers nationwide:

“October 6, 2015: 6,000 Incarcerated workers from federal prisons across the U.S. will be released this October/November, and an additional 8,550 inmates will be eligible for early release between November 1st 2015 and November 2016. The released were charged with non-violent, mostly drug-related crimes. However, this good news comes at a price, one-third of the prisoners will be deported and despite Obama’s compassionate gesture; his administration has set deportations at an all time high.”

“October 8, 2015: Incarcerated Workers from the Eastern New York Correctional Facility won in a debate against a prestigious ivy-league debate team from Harvard University. The men were part of a rigorous college program for incarcerated workers called the Bard Prison Initiative. This victory is a great example of what we, disposed people, can accomplish when we seize the power of knowledge as organized and educated incarcerated workers!”

Contact us if you wish to receive past or future editions of *Incarcerated Worker*, each issue is 20 pages.

Attention mailroom:

The First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution protects free speech. Regulations that permit the government or its employees to discriminate on the basis of the content of the message cannot be tolerated under the First Amendment (i). Further, prisoners retain free speech rights. Thought control, by means of prohibiting beliefs, would not only be undesirable but impossible (ii). Fact of confinement and needs of the penal institution impose rational limitations on prisoner free speech rights (iii), but those restrictions must have a “valid, rational connection” to “legitimate penological interests” not related to the content of ideas (iv). Regulations and practices can only be justified when the practice “furthers an important or substantial government interest unrelated to the suppression of expression” (v). This means you cannot legally suppress the expression of ideas. Prison walls do not serve to form a barrier separating prisoners from the protections of the constitution (vi). Core political speech is most-zealously guarded and there is a public interest “in having free and unhindered debate on matters of public importance—the core value of the Free Speech Clause of the First Amendment” (vii). Thus, exclusion of printed material on the basis of its political perspective amounts to free speech retaliation and discrimination, which is illegal (viii). If you exclude printed material for an unlawful basis, or if you simply conjure up a false pretext for its exclusion, you have broken the law. The prisoner recipient of this mail has cause for bringing a civil rights action against you and has cause for gaining punitive damages—which means money. You and everyone who permits this action, from your supervisor to the director of the prison system, may be named in those civil actions, and you may also be subject to termination from your employment. Because this primer is included in this mailing, you will not be able to claim you did not know your actions were illegal. For these reasons, we ask that you conform to federal law and refrain from unlawful discrimination against the enclosed materials, permitting mail service of this literature that objectively meets all legitimate criteria set forth in prison regulations. i, *Reagan v. Time, Inc.*, 468 U.W. 641, 648-49, 104 Sct 3262 (1984). “[T]he fact that society may find speech offensive is not sufficient reason for suppressing it. Indeed, if it is the speakers’ opinion that gives offense, that consequence is a reason for according it constitutional protection.” *Hustler Magazine, Inc. v. Falwell*, 495 US 45, 46, 108 Sct 876, 882. The government may not prohibit the expression of an idea simply because society finds the idea itself offensive or disagreeable. *U.S. v. Eichman*, 496 US 310, 319, 110 Sct 2404 (1990). “[A]bove all else, the First Amendment means that government has no power to restrict expression because of its message, its ideas, its subject matter, or its content.” *Police Dept. of Chicago v. Mosley*, 408 US 92, 95, 92 Sct 2286, 2290 (1972). ii, *Jones v. North Carolina Prisoners Labor Union*, 433 US 119, 97 Sct 2532 (1977). iii, *Pell v. Procunier*, 417 US 817, 822, 94 Set 2800, 2804 (1974). iv, *Turner v. Safely*, 482 US 78, 107 Sct 2245 (1987) v, *Turner, supra vi*, *Turner, supra vii*, *Pickering v. Board of Education*, 391 US 563, 573, 88 Sct 1731 (1968). viii, *Abu-Jamal v. Price*, 154 F3d 128 (3rd Cir., 1998); *X v. Blatter*, 175 F3d 378 (6th Cir. 1999)

Voices from Secure Program Facility (Boscobel)

“It needs to be noted that Wisconsin has one of the highest recidivism rates in the country; one of the contributing factors is what’s going on within the prisons. Wisconsin has abandoned the principle of rehabilitation & correcting its ‘wards,’ for that means reduced recidivism, which means less jobs for those in rural areas—farming is not getting their bills paid!”

“I accept that I’ve committed crimes against society, those crimes were unconscionable and my incapacitation from society was necessary. But I can’t accept that social, psychological and physical abuse is part of that incapacitation.”

“You asked if I do any prison labor? Of course not! On top of these prison staff slaving prisoners for 12 cents an hour, they truly and seriously act as if they’re doing the prisoners a favor by allowing them (prisoners) to mop their floors, wash their walls, etc., etc., for 12 cents an hour...you can’t get someone to respect you when you’re not respecting yourself. I’m not beneath working at all! But 12 cents an hour?! Never!”

“This system of mass resocialization is one which has taken on a strict bureaucratic tone. Everyone here is forced into a pigeonhole of sorts and this causes the process of rehabilitation to be highly ineffective to say the least.”

—Incarcerated worker at
Oshkosh Correctional
Institution

“I am legally blind now in my right eye. I use a magnifying glass to read & write. The DOC showed no sense of urgency and denied me proper medical care.”

—Incarcerated worker at
Sanger B. Powers Correctional
Center