

THE FIRST WEEK OF THE 2018 NATIONAL PRISON STRIKE

Many people are aware of the prison strike that began Aug. 21 on the 47th anniversary of George Jackson's assassination. Some of those following the strike, however, are confused by the conflicting messages that are sent out by states' departments of corrections. It's clear that prison officials are doing all that they can to suppress strike actions and prisoners' organizing of the strike.

However, prisoners are rising up in institutions across the country – and now internationally – in protest of the living and working conditions in the prisons. They also call out the legal barriers and policies that keep inmates in a state of oppression and instability. They are demanding to have ownership over transforming the circumstances that contribute to the violent environments they are forced to live within.

While at least 17 states pledged to participate in the strike prior to its beginning, it is expected that more are also involved. Below I've included an explanation behind prisoners' actions and a list of the confirmed strike activity that has already been recorded. More activism is expected to be confirmed in the coming days.

Prison strikes are not riots!

It's important to realize that prisoners striking is not equivalent to a riot. A riot is "a violent disturbance of the peace." I'd like to point out two aspects of a riot that are not applicable to prison strikes.

First, none of the actions that prisoners are taking against the prison industrial complex through their striking – whether that be through work stoppages, sit-ins, boycotts or hunger strikes – are violent actions. Jailhouse lawyers specifically chose actions that were peaceful and rely on the prisoner to make an individual decision on their participation in the strike.

The second point that I'd like to mention arguing that prison strikes are not riots is that there is nothing peaceful about a prison. There is no way to disturb the peace when peace is non-existent. So due to the fact that a riot is a violent disturbance of the peace, accusations that prisoners are inciting a riot are completely false and inapplicable to our incarcerated organizing leaders.

Prisons are inherently violent in nature; therefore, prisoners are serving their communities within the prison as well as their regions and their nation by making the choice to point out the nature of prisons as being oppressive centers of abuse and violence. These brave prisoners are serving every single person who suffers from the mass prison industrial complex as an inmate or the loved one of an inmate.

They are serving the future generations of people who will not have to live within these violent and abusive conditions because they are taking the risk to stand up against them today with concrete demands. It is our responsibility to support them.

Strike actions confirmed thus far:

Week One: Strike activity has been confirmed in the highlighted states. Let's light up the country!

This first week of the strike has just come to an end and we have seen a substantial wave of success. The mainstream media attention on the strike has been monumentally greater than we have ever seen in the past.

Along with this, the public narrative towards prisoners has changed dramatically from their being viewed as "violent animals that need to be put in their place" to "individuals seeking enriching living conditions who are in need of support for their environments to become truly rehabilitative." The public eye is focused on securing and protecting prisoners' rights.

We are also committed to highlighting the injustices that are inherent to our criminal justice system. Below I've included updates with details from today's press release:

Washington – Representatives of over 200 immigrant detainees at Northwest Detention Center in Tacoma, Washington, declared a hunger strike on Day One of the national prison strike. Amid fears of retaliation, 70 across three blocks participated. As of this time, seven continue to refuse food into a second week.

Georgia – Prisoners in Georgia State Prison at Reidsville have reported a strike, according to Jailhouse Lawyers Speak.

South Carolina – Jailhouse Lawyers Speak is reporting that prisoners in the following facilities are on strike: Broad River Correctional Institution, Lee Correctional Institution, McCormick Correctional Institution, Turbeville Correctional Institute, Kershaw Correctional Institution and Lieber Correctional Institution. The actions in these facilities include widespread work strikes, with only a few prisoners reporting to their jobs, and commissary boycotts. McCormick prisoners have been subjected to strip searches every day since Aug. 21.

North Carolina – Prisoners at Hyde Correctional Institution in Swanquarter, N.C., demonstrated in solidarity with the strike. There have been unconfirmed reports of strikes at other institutions across the state.

California – At New Folsom Prison, a hunger strike started by Heriberto Garcia on Aug. 21 has grown to include others. And at Lancaster State Prison near Los Angeles, William E. Brown Jr. and his group are on hunger strike.

Ohio – At least two prisoners at Toledo Correctional Institution began a hunger strike on Aug. 21. David Easley and James Ward were moved into isolation for participating and authorities have cut off their means of communication to outside contacts.

Colorado – Starting around Aug. 7, 10 prisoners at Sterling Correctional Facility announced a hunger strike against a two-week long 24-hour a day lockdown of 38 administrative segregation prisoners.

Indiana – Prisoners in the segregation unit at Wabash

food but because of our 48 hour solidarity with our brothers and sisters. It's the only way we can show support from inside of Segregation. Let everyone know we got their backs."

IWOC has confirmed that Robert Uvalle is on hunger strike in solitary at Michael Unit, Anderson County, Texas, in solidarity with the nationwide strike. Robert has been in solitary for most of his 25 years inside. Prison authorities have begun responding to the strike in media interviews denying that anything unusual is occurring in their facilities. Inside organizers predicted this would happen and urge continued skepticism and investigation. Organizers with Jailhouse Lawyer's Speak struggle to rebut these claims because of the need to protect themselves from targeted reprisals.

Before the strike started, prisoner leaders in Ohio, Florida and Texas were targeted and isolated. The state's attempts to pre-empt or deter strike action in some facilities included humiliating and demoralizing rituals.

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In previous years, prisoners who openly spoke to media suffered greatly for it. For example, Melvin Ray, Dhahi Khalid and Kinetik Justice of the Free Alabama Movement were transferred to isolation in 2014 after publicly announcing a work stoppage. Then in 2016, while still in isolation from that incident, they continued to openly advocate the Sept. 9 national strike. Kinetik Justice was sent to notoriously dangerous Kilby and Limestone prisons, where he believed authorities

intended to kill him, but continued to protest and draw attention, protecting himself from further harm.

The efforts by authorities to disrupt communication between prisoner organizers and outside support also interfere with and impede communication between prisons by inside organizers. Before the strike started, Jailhouse Lawyers Speak heard commitments to the strike and its demands from prisoners in 17 states. Prison authorities may prove successful in concealing or even deterring participation in some of those states, but they cannot refute the righteousness of the 10 prisoner demands.

Follow strike organizers, not prison officials.

Due to the fact that prison officials are blatantly lying about strike activity, we are responsible for tracking our own success. While doing this, it is critical that we continue to press prison staff and corrections officials about what's going on in corrections institutions.

Be sure to follow the following outside organizers to stay abreast of what's going on in ways that you can support from the outside: @JailLawSpeak, @SlaveryPrison, @SawariMi, @jaybeware and @IWW_IWOC.

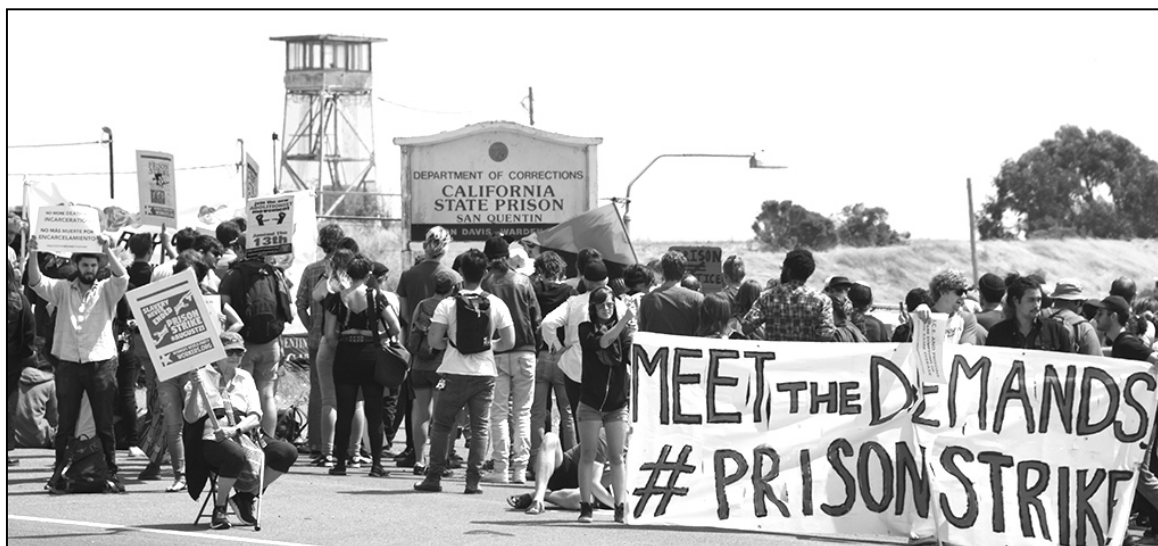
We have the right to know what the conditions are that prisoners are facing on the inside. For every prisoner or group of prisoners facing retaliation, we must support them by being aggressive in our response to the retaliation.

The work is not nearly done yet. It's just beginning, as the light is being shined into the dark spaces of our prisons, jails and detention centers, showing the messes that exist there.

Now it is time for us to continue by being proactive in cleaning up the messes that we find with the use of our own individual expertise, sharing our experiences, leaning into our passions and collaborating with each other as we each relate to the work in deconstructing the prison industrial complex and ending mass incarceration.

Support by endorsing the National Prison Strike. Support by donating to Jailhouse Lawyers. Support by attending events in your region. Support by boycotting businesses that exploit prisoners' labor.

-Amani Sawari
sfbayview.com



Five hundred turned out for a solidarity mobilization at the San Quentin West Gate on Saturday, Aug. 25. Most were young – new freedom fighters! This strike and the publicity around it are emboldening people on the outside to speak out for prisoners, empathize with their pain and fight for a world without prisons!

– Photo: G. Sharat Lin

Valley Correctional Institution initiated a hunger strike on Monday, Aug. 27, demanding adequate food and an end to cold temperatures in the unit.

New Mexico – On Aug. 9, prisoners at Lea County Correctional Facility in Hobbs, N.M., organized a work stoppage against conditions at the prison, operated by private corporation GEO Group. Tensions at the prison reached a tipping point prior to the date of the strike and prisoners could not wait before initiating their protest. All facilities in New Mexico were placed on lockdown status on the morning of Aug. 20. This statewide lockdown has since been lifted except for Lea County C.F.

Florida – Jailhouse Lawyers Speak asserts that five Florida facilities are seeing strike activity: Charlotte Correctional Institution reports 40 refusing work and 100 boycotting commissary. Prisoners at Dade Correctional say 30-40 are on strike, Franklin Correctional reports 30-60, Holmes Correctional reports 70, Apalachee Correctional reports an unknown number.

Nova Scotia, Canada – At Burnside County Jail in Halifax, prisoners went on strike and issued a protest statement in solidarity with the strike and naming local demands. They went through a lockdown and extensive negotiations with authorities, those who refused to cooperate with humiliating body scans were punished by being locked in a dry cell (no water or working toilets) for three days.

Texas – Incarcerated Workers Organizing Committee (IWOC) was forwarded a message dated Aug. 23 from inside administrative segregation (solitary) of Stiles Unit, Beaumont, Texas, confirming that two prisoners are on hunger strike in solidarity with the national action: "I feel great. But very hungry! And not because I don't have