The Truth About Right-Wing Conspiracy... And Why Clinton and the Democrats Are No Answer

3 In the Streets for Mumia Abu-Jamal

As of November 15, 1998 Chairman Gonzalo (Abimael Guzman) has been held in isolation for 6 Years, 32 Days.

In October 1992, Chairman Gonzalo—leader of the Maoist Communist Party of Peru—was sentenced to life imprisonment by hooded military judges of the U.S.-backed regime in Peru. The fascist regime in Peru is holding this revolutionary leader of the Peruvian people under very brutal conditions in an underground concrete dungeon at a naval base. He is being denied visits by lawyers, doctors and relatives and deprived of proper medical care—based on reading materials. Peru’s President Fujimori has publicly threatened to execute Chairman Gonzalo and boasted of applying psychological torture on him. Fujimori changed Peru’s constitution to legalize the death penalty, which could be used against Chairman Gonzalo and other revolutionary prisoners. The Peruvian regime must be prevented from killing Chairman Gonzalo through the death penalty or by other means.

In the “Future Is Ours” article (RW #982) two quotes were mislabeled. The remarks attributed to “Fujimori, volunter at Global exrchange” were actually made by the “spoken-word artist, with Prophets of Rage.” The remarks attributed to the “spoken-word artist, with Prophets of Rage” were actually told to the RW by a homeless man carrying the Coalition on Homelessness banner.

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**Three Main Points**

by Bob Avakian

Chairman Gonzalo’s views are from Chairman Gonzalo himself—directly and unimpeded. This heightens the urgency of the fight to create an international political climate which compels the Peruvian government to grant access to Comrade Gonzalo by his legal representatives and other friends who can meet and talk directly with him.

Support the People’s War in Peru!
Support the Communist Party of Peru!
Defend the Life of Chairman Gonzalo,
Fight to Break the Isolation!

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**Chicago Youth Battle Eviction at Cabrini Green**

As we go to press—On Monday, November 16, a hearing is scheduled in court at which the City of Chicago will be presenting their case to set a date for the destruction of the Chicago Brigade House next to the Cabrini Green housing projects.

AK Small of the Chicago Revolutionary Communist Brigade (RCB) called this “...when the system is under attack. And the destruction of Cabrini is being used as a national model—a pattern for removing and dispersing oppressed people and offering up their communities to real estate developers and banks. The whole process puts profits first, and the people a distant second. We have seen them attack the projects here, but also small Black property owners and immigrant merchants. And now they are coming to destroy our Brigade House. This house is part of the people’s resistance. And the fight to save this house has become a way people are taking on the oppressor now—not letting them just tear everything down.”

Over 200 people in Cabrini have signed a statement of support for the Brigade House. (Please note: There was a typo in last week’s RW #992. Our article on the Brigade House mistakenly reported that “20 people” had signed the statement of support. The correct number is 200.)

A press release of the “Ad Hoc Committee to Stop Police Brutality and the Displacement of Public Housing Residents” said: “This could be the last hearing before the City tries to move in the bulldozers.”

**Watch the RW for future developments in this important struggle.**

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The Revolutionary Worker (ISSN 0193-3485) is published weekly, except for the 4th week of December and the 4th week of July, by RCP Publications, Chicago, IL. All subscriptions and correspondence should be sent to Chicago, IL. Subscriptions and addresses for changes of address may be sent to the RCP Publications Central Circulation Office, P.O. Box 3486, Chicago, IL 60654, or phoned in to (773) 227-4188. Subscriptions are $40 a year, $12 for 3 months in the U.S., and $50 for a year in Canada and all other countries. The Revolutionary Worker welcomes the right to publish or edit any of our correspondents, editors, or writers. Subscriptions to the RW are distributed through the overall battle against repression and against legal and political attacks on the RCP.

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Special to the RW
On November 7, 2,500 people demonstrated in Philadelphia to protest the Pennsylvania Court's decision to sign a warrant for Mumia Abu-Jamal's execution. Contingents were organized by students and youth from many places, including the University of Pennsylvania, anarchists from Philadelphia and Antioch College, Richmond, Virginia; Maine and New Hampshire; and large contingents from Refuse & Resist! and the December 12th Movement. MOVE members carried a banner with a quote from their founder, John Africa. There were also members of Pro Libertas, an organization fighting to free Puerto Rican political prisoners, Academies for Mumia Abu-Jamal, the October 22nd Coalition to Stop Police Brutality, the Eddie Conway Support Committee, the Black Panther Collective, a number of groups who oppose the death penalty, and Worker's World Party. The International Action Center made hundreds of signs with Mumia's picture which were carried in a march that wound through the streets of downtown Philadelphia.

In the San Francisco Bay Area, 1,000 people took to the streets on November 7 in an action organized by the Mobilization to Free Mumia Abu-Jamal coalition. The urgency of Mumia's case drew a diverse crowd of youth, revolutionaries, activists and others. A high school teacher brought her class of 30 from an Oakland high school; people from the nearby projects joined in the march; carpools from Santa Cruz, San Jose, Monterey came. Speaking on this day included: Angela Davis, a member of Third Eye who read a statement from Assata Shakur; Amira Baraka (LeRoi Jones); Walter Johnson, secretary treasurer of the San Francisco AFL-CIO who is proposing a work stoppage for Mumia; Anna Brown, from Academies for Mumia Abu-Jamal; Jeff Mackler, Socialist Action; Campaign to End the Death Penalty; a representative of the Black Radical Congress; International Socialist Organization; Richard Becker (Workers World); Socialist Party in Ireland and poet Adrienne Rich.

Demonstrations for Mumia took place on November 7 in many other cities including: Chicago IL, Ann Arbor MI, Austin TX, Bangor ME, Bloomington IN, Burlington VT, Gainesville FL, Louisville KY, Los Angeles CA, Madison WI, Minneapolis MN, Nashville TN, Portland OR, San Diego CA, San Francisco CA, Seattle WA, Calgary (Canada), Venda Redonda (Brazil), Amsterdam (Holland), Besancons (France), Hamburg (Germany), Marseille (France), Paris (France), Rome (Italy), Oslo (Norway), Strasbourg (France) and Cape Town (South Africa).

The following are excerpts from statements given at the rally in Philadelphia:

"I want to tell you first the good news. On the eve of this demonstration, and probably because of it, we heard yesterday from the governor's office that despite his public statements that he will sign a warrant for Mumia's execution as soon as the Supreme Court rules he's now stating that he's really in no hurry. And that warrant will not be signed, we feel, immediately. But then there's the bad news and the bad news is this. Back in 1995 as we were about to go into court to seek a new trial, the governor's office contacted us and said they would not sign a warrant for Mumia's execution so long as we go into court. And on our way to court, Governor Ridge signed a warrant for his execution. So we can't trust the word of this governor. We can't believe whatever they're saying in Mumia's case and we have to remain vigilant.

"Where we go now— we will wait for the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania to reconsider their decision. We've asked them to take another look at it, that it is so obviously wrong they must re-examine the record and they will do that this month. And we will have a new decision before the end of November. And if they reject our position now, then we believe the governor very well might issue a warrant for Mumia's execution. If that happens, we will go into federal court and we will seek a stay of that warrant until we litigate in the federal courts of the United States.

"These courts have overturned 35 percent of all of the death cases coming out of the state in the United States. There would be over 5,000 awaiting execution in the United States instead of 3,500. And the pro-death penalty forces knew this and in 1996 after the Oklahoma City bombing case they reinstated the federal judge. So now they can't conduct the independent review that Mumia's case needs. And we're going to argue that that law is unconstitutional. And we're going to wait and see what a federal court will do.

"But your presence, your strength, your outcry is going to be very critical to what happens when we're in federal court. Don't think you don't matter. In 1972, the United States Supreme Court threw out the death penalty and 600 people who were waiting for execution were freed from death row. Why did it happen in '72? It happened in '72 because the civil rights movement was strong, the anti-war movement was strong, the women's movement was strong, the environmental movement was strong and the Native People's movement was strong.

"Your voice in the case of Mumia is going to be a very critical voice in the '90s as we seek once again to stop the insanity of the state killing and halt the executions not just of Mumia, but all 3,500 on death row. And we should be mindful today as we stand with Mumia that Brother [Tyrone] Gilliam in Delaware was waiting for execution were freed because no matter how evil a government may be, they cannot defeat the power of the people. Your work and help is needed more than ever. We must now live and breathe Mumia's case 24 hours a day. If we are able to unite to stop the execution of Mumia Abu-Jamal, we are not only saving the life of a man who speaks for those who are not often heard and whose stories are rarely told, but you are saving all of us who remain unjustly imprisoned but trust in our freedom and are ignored by the corporate owned justice system and media.

"I want to encourage supporters to intensify the struggle for Mumia's life. I know that you can stop this execution by no matter how evil a government may be, they cannot defeat the power of the people. Your work and help is needed more than ever. We must now live and breathe Mumia's case 24 hours a day. If we are able to unite to stop the execution of Mumia Abu-Jamal, we are not only saving the life of a man who speaks for those who are not often heard and whose stories are rarely told, but you are saving all of us who remain unjustly imprisoned but trust in our freedom and are ignored by the corporate owned justice system and media.

"As long as the people have not accepted defeat, neither will we. So I would like to encourage you to stay strong and to struggle. The People's movement is strong and the Native People's movement was strong. It's important that we come together. It's important that we come together. It's important that we come together. It's important that we come together. It's important that we come together. It's important that we come together.
The Fight to Stop the Execution of Willie Enoch

"If I told you that a fellow was about to be executed who had a lawyer with no capital experience. If I told you that, that lawyer failed to file a motion so that his appeal was rendered useless, you would say that's an outrage. That's what a trial is all about." - Julia Wright, daughter of author Richard Wright

"This man has spent his life fighting for us. Since before many of us were even born, Mumia Abu-Jamal has been speaking for us, fighting for us, looking out for us, and people deserve to know that. And people deserve to know that there's a highly organized, well-funded movement that's trying to take this man's life from us. They deserve to know this because most of them all deserve to have a say in this. They deserve to have a chance to fight for Mumia Abu-Jamal like we've already seen so many young people do once they find out what's at stake. They need to know that this man stood for them and that his face is the face of justice." - Jana, Refuse & Resist! Youth Network Representative from Nation of Islam in Philadelphia

"I am the father of the 13-year-old boy who was shot and killed by a housing police officer. He was playing with a toy gun. I am here today to show the world that Mumia is innocent. It is important that we get this brother Mumia free because he has a powerful voice in society and his voice is nothing but truth. And truth is power and that's why they are refusing to release this man." - Nicholas Heyward, Parents Against Police Brutality, Repression and Extrajudicial Executions

In the Streets for Mumia

Continued from page 3 from the depths of hopelessness:

"Free Mumia Abu-Jamal in the Spirit of Crazy Horse, Leonard Peltier"

Political Prisoner Leonard Peltier

"We're going past the site where police brutality happened to Mumia. And like Mumia says, the only reason why he's on death row now is because he survived. The only reason why my sister Ramona Alaska did seven years in jail is because she survived. The only reason why I've got brothers and sisters doing 30 to 100 years in jail is because they survived. But what we're here to say to this government, you ain't surviving.... We are organizing, and again, you ain't got enough goddamn jails. You ain't got enough damned graveyards to stop this movement."

Pam Africa, MOVE and International Concerned Family and Friends of Mumia Abu-Jamal

"The fact that the state will once again seek to take your life sickens me. I remember the descriptions of the heinous treatment prisoners receive when placed in Phase II. Amnesty International will be calling upon its members worldwide, a million of them, to campaign to stop your execution." - From a letter to Mumia written by Pierre Sanfie of Amnesty International

"I am the daughter of the 13-year-old boy who was shot and killed by a housing police officer. He was playing with a toy gun. I am here today to support free Mumia. And it's important that we organize and get ourselves together. We have been fighting and struggling for my son for the last four years. There is no justice in this system. There is none at all. The justice that is in this system is between us criminals. We have to fight ourselves for justice for our children and for our families. It is important that we get this brother Mumia free because he has a powerful voice in society and his voice is nothing but truth. And truth is power and that's why they are refusing to release this man."

Nerissa Howard, Parents Against Police Brutality and Repression and Extrajudicial Executions

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"I was fortunate enough to go up to the prison on last Sunday to see Mumia and he is strong. He is strong because he knows that you're here. He's strong because he knows that you'll carry on the struggle for him when he cannot. The family is here that can be here. We're here to walk with you and march with you, but we couldn't do it without you. We appreciate you. We respect you. Thank you." - Lydia Baraksharga, Mumia's sister

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Lateefe, Mumia's daughter

"We have to close the door on executions in this country. We have to close the door on their moves to execute Mumia Abu-Jamal. And we can't just continue to just talk about it, we must do something about it. And we're going to make it heard and understood clearly that this will not happen. That they will not execute Mumia Abu-Jamal. And they need to think before they do something that they cannot undo. Justice has to be served, the death penalty has to be fought and Mumia Abu-Jamal has to be freed!"

Latasha Bukait, co-chair, New York Coalition to Free Mumia Abu-Jamal

Chicago, November 7

Speech Movement in Berkeley in the 1960s, sometimes the operation of this system becomes so odious to people of conscience that they have no choice but to throw their bodies into the gears of the machinery and bring it to a halt!" - Carl Dix, National Spokesperson, Revolutionary Community Party

"If I told you that a fellow was about to be executed who had a lawyer with no capital experience. If I told you that, that lawyer failed to file a motion so that his appeal was rendered useless, you would say that's an outrage. That's what a trial is all about." - Julia Wright, daughter of author Richard Wright

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"All we're asking is justice. If we can't get justice, we wanna do what we gotta do to get it." - Lateefe, Mumia's daughter

"We have to close the door on executions in this country. We have to close the door on their moves to execute Mumia Abu-Jamal. And we can't just continue to just talk about it, we must do something about it. And we're going to make it heard and understood clearly that this will not happen. That they will not execute Mumia Abu-Jamal. And they need to think before they do something that they cannot undo. Justice has to be served, the death penalty has to be fought and Mumia Abu-Jamal has to be freed!" - Latasha Bukait, co-chair, New York Coalition to Free Mumia Abu-Jamal

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The Truth About Right-Wing Conspiracy

And Why Clinton and the Democrats Are No Answer

There is in fact a right-wing conspiracy. There is a concerted effort by the Christian Right and those allied with it to "get" Clinton—e to force him from office. But more essentially and more importantly, there is a determined, many-sided effort by powerful forces within American society to put into effect an aggressively reactionary and repressive political and social agenda. Despite its fervent condemnations of "Big Government," this program actually involves a broad extension of Big Brother intrusion into people's everyday lives and a police-state battering ram smashing down supposed Constitutional rights and protections. All this has been justified—and "sanctified"—through a highly orchestrated crusade for traditional values and a professed moral righteousness represented by old-time religion.

While, on the one hand, Clinton has been a target of the most undisguised and vociferous right-wing forces—and in particular those associated with "The Religious Right"—the truth is that, to a large degree, the Clinton Presidency has been about promoting, and implementing, much of this program and its "moral-religious" rationalizations. And, even where they have had real differences—and at times bitter conflicts—with the self-proclaimed Right, Clinton and the Democrats have continually given ground to the Right and increasingly accepted the terms set by the Right as the "common ground" on which to differ and contend.

This is not because of the much-discussed "realities of electoral politics." Nor is it merely because all mainstream politicians are beholden to powerful financial interests. More fundamentally, it is because those who occupy seats of political power must, and can only, serve the economic and social system of which that political power is an extension. And, in the present period and the present "global environment," the requirements of the capitalist economic and social system not only demand that the lords of capital be able to carry out their supreme commandment, "let us prey," in a more unrestrained and more "mobile" way, on a world scale. They also demand, within American society itself, a slashing of major social programs and a heightening of the repressive powers of government, along with the fostering of a repressive social atmosphere. They demand what the organization Refuse and Resist called the politics of cruelty, or the politics of poverty, punishment, and patriarchy.

On this, the mainstream of the bourgeois body politic is in agreement, even while they differ and at times battle sharply over some of the terms, over the pace and the specific forms, with which to implement this politics—and the extremes to which it should be carried at any given time.

This whole politics can be opposed—very powerful opposition to it can be built—but it can only be done by refusing to be bound by the terms set by this system and the political framework within which all of its political representatives think and act. It can be done, not by trying to rely on Clinton and the Democrats, but by relying on and rallying the truly vast numbers of people who have a real interest in opposing this whole program—vast numbers of people among whom there is a stirring and a growing sense, if still largely undeveloped and untapped, that there is a need to stand up against and defeat this program.
A Presidency Under Fire from the Beginning

In the early stages of the "Monica Lewinsky scandal," Hillary Clinton made a foray into the national political conversation with her various "sex with co-conspirators"—which was not only behind the attacks on her husband then but which had targeted his predecessor from the West as well. This idea has been widely subjected to ridicule and criticism—including, not surprisingly, by those she was speaking of as a co-conspirator and as the "Lewinsky scandal" and the overall "Presidential crisis" has unfolded, the growing chorus from the powerful and influential has been that there should be more importance and less accusation from the Clinton camp. But the question remains: Is there such a conspiracy? On one level, the answer could be given straight and simple. "Duh!"" But is it necessary to get more deeply into what is represented by the contesting political forces in the current "Presidential crisis" and where does the interest of the people lie in relation to all this?

To begin with, it is worthwhile recalling the remarks of Jane Helm, "Senior Senator from North Carolina," and long-time figure for southern black memorandum shortly after Clinton took office. Helm made statements to the general effect that Clinton was unworthy to be considered in the elite of the armed forces, and Helm explicitly warned the President that he was so unpopular on the military bases in North Carolina that "Mr. Clinton better watch out if he comes down here. He'd better have a body guard." This was actually quite common, but what is very significant is that it was treated, by the mainstream media and the political 己^-'I^'^-I 2-^ ^-r^-1^-^-^-^-^I^-^--^--^--^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^-^n
While the very latest "conventional wisdom" is that, in the wake of the recent elections, "fiscal conservatism" is "in," as opposed to an emphasis on "social" conservatism and "morality"—a more sweeping analysis shows that the advocates of "moral revival" have gained considerable ground over the past two decades, that they have succeeded to a considerable degree in setting the terms of the current "Presidential crisis," and that they continue to be a formidable force, highly connected and highly financed.

And why Clinton and the Democrats Are No Answer

...In today's circumstances has produced effects and sequences that have been a marked feature of this recovery, has also contributed to "unwinding" of the U.S. economy that has taken place during the Clinton administration, and the more highly "globalized" and "flexible" production that has been a marked feature of this recovery, has also contributed to "undermining" the traditional family. And it has fostered the "social" and "moral" advances and progress that have been, in a word, for exploitation, veiled by religious and political illusions.

But, in the view of Clinton's conservative and particularly his fundamentalist opponents, Clinton's programs will not work and will only undermine the historically established goals of the system, both in the superstructure of culture and ideology —it will lead to the undermining of the legitimating social "consensus" and social "cohesion" necessary to maintain this system. And the fact is that there are today in the U.S. huge numbers of people, who, yeo, participated in or were influenced by the movements of the '60s and have a corresponding commitment to social justice and equality, and who are unwilling to go along with the notion that America has some inherent moral right and obligation to bully its way around the world and impose a world order under its domination. At the same time, there is the phenomenon that, in some important aspects, the neoliberals—"to resurrect a situation where worldwide exploitation that is unassured in its brutality is at the same time "veiled by religious and political illusions."

In this regard, there is a very interesting—and in some ways provocative—article, "The Erosion of American National Interest," in Foreign Affairs, magazine (September/October 1997), by Samuel P. Huntington, a "conservative" who criticizes Clinton particularly for his promotion of "multi-culturalism" and "diversity." Huntington warns that the "disintegrative effect" of the end of the Cold War (in particular, the "loss" of the Soviet Union as a powerful enemy and serious rival for world domination), compounded by multi-culturalism and ethnic particularity within the U.S. itself, could lead to a lack of unity around "national interest" and undermine the necessary projection of American imperial power internationally. Huntington even goes so far as to say: "If multiculturalism prevails and if the consequences on liberal democracy disintegrate, the United States could join the Soviet Union in the sick heap of history." Clinton's Presi-
A Lunatic Yet “Legitimate”—and Deadly Serious—Fascism

Not only are the politics and ideology of such people obviously reactionary, but in some cases they are also extremely dangerous. In this context, I turn to a recent book written by Pat Robertson, the leading religious conservative in the United States, which has become a best-seller. The book is entitled "The Gospel of Money," and it is a clear and explicit endorsement of the views that Robertson has been expressing for some time now.

Robertson argues that the current economic crisis is the result of immoral and ungodly practices, and that only through a return to traditional values and a strict adherence to the Bible can we overcome this crisis. He cites numerous examples from history to support his argument, and he concludes that the time has come for a new religious and political movement in this country.

Robertson’s views are not unique, however. The Republican Party, and the conservative movement in general, are increasingly dominated by people who share his beliefs. This is not just a matter of opinion; it is a matter of fact. The evidence is all around us, and it is growing more apparent with each passing day.

Robertson is not alone in his views. There are many others who share his beliefs, and they are becoming more and more influential in our society. This is a dangerous situation, and we must take it seriously.

So what can be done? There are many things that can be done, but the most important thing is to educate ourselves about the nature of this movement and its dangers. We must also work to build alliances with other groups who are opposed to these views, and we must be prepared to take action when necessary.

In short, we must be bold and decisive in our response to this threat. We cannot afford to be complacent or passive. We must be active and engaged, and we must work together to oppose this movement and its goals.

This is not an idle threat. It is a real and present danger. We must act now to prevent it from doing any more damage. The stakes are too high for anything less.
In the sphere of repression and police-state measures, Clinton has refused to be outdone by his conservative opponents. He has presided over the criminalization of whole sections of people, in particular the youth in the inner cities, and the situation where increasingly funds are going to prisons instead of schools and, for growing numbers of inner-city youth, prisons instead of schools are the formative years of whole sections of people who are the targets of this "enforcement." At the same time the Clinton administration has taken no real initiative to reverse the situation in which increasingly, for very large numbers of women, particularly poor women, young women, and those in rural areas, abortion is effectively unavailable or available only to the "unwanted." 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domination of corporate and banking capital over the farm economy?" "Personal responsibility" adds insult to injury—and, more than that, "personal responsibility" serves as the "moral logic" that is intended to accompany the politics of punishment, the plea words pronounced by the executioners.

### False Friends and Well-Laid Traps

To quote one writer, a self-described "old-school fan of the public sector," it has "become difficult to feel any enthusiasm for a government whose activity seems to consist mainly of harassing and jailing citizens. Those who hoped that a Clinton administration might right some wrongs have been bitterly disappointed." (William F. Buckley, "Cold War" New York Times, June 20, 1998.) Yet, in the face of the mounting onslaught from The Right—and in general and more specifically in the current "Presidential crisis"—there is a whole number of people who might share a sense of bitter disappointment with the Clinton administration and the Democrats generally, yet are nonetheless rallying behind them. In the context of the recent elections, the present has largely been channeled, into the electoral arena. In the days leading into the election, Clinton made a concerted effort to mobilize Black voters in particular. As he put it, it is an appeal to Black clergy: "If you feel in your heart that you are part of a movement, then join it. Let's get on with it." Reality this is an important election." And, indeed, among Black people, including some influential figures in the arts and other fields, the sentiment has been voiced that Black people do have a special stake in Clinton's Presidency.

Of course, Clinton is not the first president about whom the claim has been made: he has shown none real commitment to the concerns of Black people. (This was also said about previous presidents, such as John F. Kennedy and Franklin Roosevelt, and even Lyndon Johnson.) But beyond this, it is argued that Clinton is intimately familiar with Black culture but not Black people. And the argument has been made for (for example, in an article by Tony Montana in The New Yorker that, we) do not see a core interest in the lives of any actual black person who could ever be elected in our children's lifetime"—because "Clinton is our first black president"—"Blacker than any actual black person who could ever be elected in our children's lifetime.

Clinton displays almost every trope of Blackness: single-parent household, born poor, working-class, saxophone, "freestyle," and so on. And now, Clinton is shown some influential figures in the arts and other fields, the sentiment has been voiced that Black people do have a special stake in Clinton's Presidency.

The real commitment to the concerns of Black people, and more, whom the claim has been made: he has shown some support for the re-institutibn of chain gangs in southern prisons. For example—there is nothing new about all this...except that Clinton is the Republicans, who are well-known and in power, have decided to make this—"It is one of the most outrageous ironies

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The theme of "personal responsibility" is an ideological weapon which serves the function of blaming the people for the failure of bourgeois society to live up to principles and promises it proclaims, and in particular blaming those in the inner cities for the impoverished and oppressed conditions that have developed. Did the people in the ghettos and barrios "de-industrialize" the cities and forcibly segregate housing, or for that matter did the people in the rural areas bring about the domination of corporate and banking capital over the farm economy?

not only the immediate "Presidential crisis" but also the general claim that whatever the politicians like the Bush Brothers are now being presented as representatives of the "moderate" wing of the bourgeois political class are motivated in their "minimum politics" are being continually reasserted. The world in which the New Democrats and the Clintons can be grouped together with Republicans like the Bush Brothers as part of the present political system.

In relation to the "current Presidential crisis," the so-called "Firm Friends" identified as "For Night" has been an available, for a considerable period of time, as a driving force in an illusion which, among other things, has been presented as "character" or "personality" as a political standard—powerful figures, like Senate majority leader Trent Lott, president of the university they are owing to and fighting into the personal lives of people and persecuting the people they have been put forward with particular intensity in relation to Democrats, and not only the Christian fascist and other "conservatives" have played a major part in promoting this view.

As to participation in the bourgeois electoral process, we have made clear that this process is an instrument of capitalist rule—an instrument of what in fact bourgeois dictatorship is motivated to a significant degree by personal ambition, and they do seek to strengthen the notion through the political structures and processes of that system. Besides the neglect, regarding, getting elected and advancing your personal career as a bourgeois politician depends above all on getting big money support and getting favorable treatment in the mass media which, again, are controlled by the big money interests.

In activity, political decisions and government policies will arise through consensus as well as collaboration within the ranks of the ruling class and its representatives. Through all this a general consensus is forged and indeed put forward on new terms in regard to major questions and major developments in society and the world, including revolutionary wars and other struggles against the system—and, in fact, the inability to achieve such a consensus through the "normal" functioning and channels of the system is an indication of a serious crisis. In conformity with this process of decision-making and consensus that is reached, orchestrated and mainstreamed campaigns are carried out through the mass media to shape public opinion around all important issues. (This includes the entertainment as well as the "news" media. For example notice how repeatedly the new becomes a "triumph of crime and criminals," and to use all necessary images to "defeat terrorism," "dramatized," and how "family values" has recently become a major theme, not only on television but also in movies produced by that "Sodom of liberal decadence," Hollywood.

These dynamics of class rule and class struggle, rooted in the contradictions of economic composition and social relations of the system, are the basis for all government policy. This is the basis on which the New Deal was adopted by the American government in the context of the 1930s Great Depression. It is the basis on which the "war on poverty" became government policy during the upheavals of the 1960s. And it is the basis on which the New Deal and the "war on poverty" have now been abashed, as discussed earlier in this article. It is the basis on which such questions were made into a particular issue of Black people in the 1960s and the basis on which the New Deal has backed away from and underestimated many of these consequences. It is the basis on which the U.S. got into the Vietnam war—and the basis on which the U.S. got out of Vietnam on which laws were changed (or the Constitution interpreted) in ways that vitally affect women, including particularly the reproductive rights of women and abortion—"and the war, on which the right to abortion is now under attack from powerful people who have a great deal of money and control over even the those in government who claim to "defend" this right have cast it in a defensive and negative light in the supposed interest of the family and the law"). In none of these cases—or in countless others that have arisen since the New Deal—the political process been the decisive and determining factor.

It has been widely acclaimed that, in the recent elections, "minorities, women, and union members made the difference." It may be true that these votes were crucial in determining that the Democratic Party gained a few seats in Congress, but such votes were not and could not "make the difference" in determining the overall direction of government policy or in determining the whole process of repression, enslavement, and patriarchy, on which the Democrats as well as the Republicans are fundamentalists. Of course, once again, the range of programs and policies that all politicians must consider to, if they wish to remain in office, in determined by not the voting broths but within the ranks of the ruling class. And the result is, first of all, that the "choices" people have in voting have been limited to the range of those broths by those with the real power in society and, regardless of the outcome of any particular election, those with the real power will determine among themselves what political decisions will be made and what policies will be the most important issues. This, more than anything else, explains why politicians consistently lie and go to such election gimmicks. It also explains why nearly no one can see that oppressed people voice overwhelmingly for the bourgeois political parties, but that party must somehow "deliver to them." How many times, for example, have Black people voted overwhelmingly for Democrats only to have the Democrats betray the Black voters with "campaigns" made to get those votes, and, within the confines of bourgeois political ideology, what can Black people do to "pound the

Democrats for this repeated betrayal—vote for the Republic.

This all does not mean that the masses can have no effect on politics. They can have great effect, even while the society is still ruled by the capitalist class—to say nothing of the profound effects they can achieve through revolutionary wars and other struggles against the system. There are no limits to what they can achieve through the framework set by the bourgeois electoral system and by the process of decision-making that breaks out of the terms and limits set by those who dominate that electoral process.

A dramatic illustration of the reality and the principles involved here is provided by looking at two Presidential elections during the Vietnam War—one near the beginning and the other toward the end of that war. First, in 1964, a major theme of the campaign of Lyndon Johnson was that it was time to re-elect him as President because his Republican opponent, Barry Goldwater, was a "crypto-Nazi" and he would dramatically escalate the war in Vietnam. Johnson won in a "landslide," and sooner was

Clinton has come over an aggressive intensification of repression and measures to maintain thousands of workers thrown out of work and the police attack on the people. 

Abortion September 1997

*Footnote: For a fuller discussion of the role of elections in capitalist society, see Democracy, Can't We Do Better Than That, by Bob Avakian.
The truth about Right-Wing Conspiracy...  

How do we GET OUT of this situation? The answer is that it must and can only be done by mobilizing broad ranks of people, uniting people from many different strata and walks of life, to build determined resistance to this whole reactionary program and to transform the whole “political terrain”—resistance that is not limited to and does not rely on the very political structures, institutions and processes that are the means through which this reactionary offensive is being carried out and given “legitimacy.”

Taking Back the High Ground Politically and Morally  

A crucial part of doing this, in fact, to directly and uncompromisingly take on the theocratic Christian fascists and those allied with them—not only in their political program but also in their ideological-religious moralizations—and to pose a powerful positive alternative to this. These people attempt to set on fire the “moral high ground” by setting themselves up as the upholders of a tradition-steeped moral certitude to which we are supposed to adhere, the only moral certainty, the only true and self-indulgent degeneracy. They proclaim that they stand for a literal and absolute interpretation of “biblical truth” and adherence to biblically based commandments and law. But the truth is that the modern and ideological principles they proclaim are wildly in conflict even with what can be accepted in bourgeois-democratic society, to say nothing of a communist society in which all relations of exploitation and oppression have been eliminated and ignored. And for that reason, the leading figures among them, who are above all convinced and calculating political opportunists, do not and cannot insist on a literal and absolute application of biblical laws and commandments. To do that would actually undermine their political objectives. Instead, they “adapt” these commandments which of these laws and commandments to insist on, and which to avoid or “explain away” according to their particular circumstances.

As many examples, in a full-page ad in the LA Today (August 26, 1998) a group of Christian fundamentalists, purported Southern Baptists for their stand on marriage: “Southern Baptists...you are right! According to this ad, these Southern Baptists were “right” because they insisted that wives must “graciously submit to their husbands” and husbands “rule” over their wives, and because they proclaimed that “the family was God’s idea, not man’s, and that marriage in a covenant between one man and one woman.” They made a virtue of what is represented by the fundamentalist reac-tionaries and the implications of this for the masses of people, overwhelmingly women, who are distanced from all the positive qualities of a libertarian politics. The fundamentalists insist that the woman must submit to the will of the man, that a woman must be obedient to her husband, and that to not do so is to submit to “false gods.” This is the “political terrain” of the Christian fascists, and at the same time to all forms and expressions of bourgeois ideology and bourgeois society. But we also recognize, consistent with our outlook and principles, that there is a need, and a basis, for building a broad unity among people, to bring about this goal, a freely associating community of human beings, worldwide. The moral and political unity we uphold and strive to arrive at is based on a common commitment to defend, and to uphold and further, what effect do they have on society and the people? The world outlook and the political views and actions of the Christian fascists must go beyond merely insisting that they have no right to impose their partisan ideology, to impose their version of “biblical truth” on others and on society as a whole. Nor is it really necessary, to build determined resistance to this whole reactionary program and to transform the whole “political terrain”—resistance that is not limited to and does not rely on the very political structures, institutions and processes that are the means through which this reactionary offensive is being carried out and given “legitimacy.”

On November 15, President Clinton announced that the U.S. had pulled back from an imminent military attack on Iraq. He declared that the threat of U.S. bombings had forced the Iraqi government to accept the "unconditional" return of UN weapons inspectors into Iraq. Clinton said that he would once again enter war on Iraq if Saddam Hussein challenged the inspectors again.

Leading up to this development, the U.S. had been sending more bomber planes, warships, missiles and troops to the Persian Gulf to bolster the large offensive force already in the area. U.S. officials in Washington calmly discussed how this strike, if carried out, would be the most "significant" since the 1991 Gulf War. These cold-blooded monsters were talking about dropping more bombs and missiles on a devastated country—where many hundreds of thousands have already died from the 1991 Gulf War and years of economic sanctions.

Everyone remembers the video of the L.A. cops mercilessly beating Rodney King as he lay helpless on the ground. The U.S. imperialists are brutalizing a whole country and its people.

The U.S. war makers justify the threat of force against Iraq by saying that Saddam Hussein and his "weapons of mass destruction" are a danger to the world. There is a danger from "weapons of mass destruction"—but this danger comes from the U.S. It's the U.S. that uses its huge high-tech war machine to bully its way around the world. It's the U.S. that has built up an arsenal of thousands of nuclear warheads, each capable of destroying a city. It's the U.S. that sends billions of dollars of arms exports to "friendly" regimes who follow orders from Washington.

Gen. Shelton, the head of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, said that Saddam Hussein poses a threat to an area of "vital national interest" to the U.S. and a threat to the U.S. military forces in the region. Why does the U.S. have "vital interests" and station tens of thousands of troops halfway around the world in the Persian Gulf? Because it is an imperialist power, acting on imperialist interests. What the U.S. is doing in the Persian Gulf has nothing to do with "protecting the people of the world from weapons of mass destruction" or any other phony justification.

As Bob Avakian, Chairman of the RCP/USA, says, "Why do we call them imperialism? Because they exploit and oppress people all over the world. They have developed an empire and they will do anything to try and preserve it. It is the same people robbing and exploiting, degrading and humiliating us over the whole world. That's why we call it imperialism, because that's what it is."

Even if a new series of bombings is not carried out this time, the U.S. is already committing murder on a mass scale in Iraq. For almost eight years, economic sanctions imposed by the U.S. and its allies have deprived the Iraqi people of food, medicine, and other vital supplies. Denis Halliday, a former UN aid coordinator stationed in Iraq, said that "4,000 to 5,000 children are dying unaccountably every month due to the impact of sanctions because of the breakdown of water and sanitation, inadequate diet and the bad internal health situation." Overall more than 1.2 million Iraqis, including 700,000 children below the age of five, have died because of the shortages of food and medicine.

The U.S. has repeatedly blocked any move to lighten the sanctions. In the last couple of months, the Iraqi government stopped cooperating with the inspections and declared that cooperation would resume only if there was some real assurance that economic sanctions will be eventually lifted. Since the end of the Gulf War, Iraq has been forced to submit to humiliating searches by the arms inspectors who snoop around factories, government offices and military sites all over the country. The inspectors are supposed to be "independent," but in fact they are closely tied to the U.S. A November 11 report by NBC and other recent news reports reveal that the arms inspectors have briefed U.S. officials on sensitive information such as Iraqi military deployments. In other words, they are spies for the U.S.

The U.S. has cynically used the weapons inspections as a weapon against Iraq. The Iraqi government was quite justified in refusing to cooperate and demanding that the sanctions come to an end. In his November 15 announcement, Clinton did not even talk about lifting the sanctions. And he openly threatened to overwhelm the current government of Iraq.

The majority of people here in the U.S. have no common interests with the imperialist rulers—and much in common with the people of Iraq. The people of Iraq are our sisters and brothers, not our enemy. Our enemy is right at home—those in power who brutalize and steal the lives of ordinary people here and around the world.

In February of this year, the last time that the U.S. threatened to bomb Iraq, the Clinton administration tried to gather public support by sending Secretary of State Albright and Secretary of Defense Cohen to a nationally televised "town meeting" at Ohio State University. But these imperialist spokespeople were shut up by righteous opposition from the audience, and sparked protests around the country. Any new war moves against Iraq by the U.S.—and the sanctions that continue to kill thousands of Iraqi people every month—must be met with broad and determined protest.

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NY, NJ: Hunger Strike at INS Detention Centers

It was a foggy Saturday night in late May when the Oops II, a 250-foot powerhouse, got beached off the exclusive coast of Point town of Bay Head, New Jersey. The small boat—one in a relay of powerboats, sailboats, fisherboat and planes stretching back to China’s Fujian province—carried 23 young men. With no exit, else to go but anchor, they sailed through the cold waters to the beach. On land, they wandered through the shrubbery and back yards of the million-dollar houses, hoping to make a getaway. But the authorities were locked up in the federal detention center at Elizabeth, New Jersey—treated as criminals, held in a crowded facility, subject to brutal and inhumane conditions. Welcome to America.

The immigrants from the Oops II are among the thousands of people currently held in INS detention centers. According to a recent report by Human Rights Watch, there are now about 15,000 people under INS detention—a 70 percent increase from just 10 years earlier. The report estimates that by 2001, they will have more than 23,000 people under their control. This is an outrage as so many thousands of people are held in jail for the “crime” of trying to make a better life.

At the number of immigrants held in detention soared, there is also increasing resistance inside the INS jails. In recent months, there have been a series of hunger strikes and other protests in detention centers around the country. In late September and early October, there were two hunger strikes in INS detention centers in the New York area. The first hunger strike took place in Elizabeth, New Jersey.

The Elizabeth detention center is run by a for-profit company, the Correction Corporation of America. It mainly holds people seeking asylum and those rounded up in workplace raids. (The New York area has one of the largest unprocessed immigrant populations in the U.S., following Los Angeles.) The strike began because ofhumanitarian and legal issues, such as guards’ insufficient food, court delays and New Jersey’s decision to suppress the issues. Immigrants have to remain in custody while awaiting the disposition of their cases.

The Elizabeth facility is the site of the former Eastern detention center, where immigrants were placed against intolerable conditions in June 1995. During the rebellion, some immigrants confessed to violent acts and faced guards to flee the building. After a few hours a police SWAT team stormed the detention center and took back the prison. About two dozen immigrants from various parts of the world were taken to the nearby county jail. For three days, these immigrants were beaten, forced to remain naked, made to crawl on their hands and knees through a gauntlet of jail officers, and ordered to chant “America is number one.”

The spirit of resistance at Elizabeth was rekindled with the hunger strike at the end of this September. At its peak, the strike involved 50 people in a facility that holds 530. The authorities responded by accusing four people of being organizers, putting them in isolation and subjecting them to disciplinary hearings. In an attempt to justify this bizarre political persecution, the director of the Newark INS said, “There were 60 people on strike and the protection officers were intimidating people, inciting them to eat, and intimidating others not to eat.” Those were the words during the period we had to separate them."

Another Oluwole, one of the four accused of being protest organizers, explained his story in a local paper. “The main thing we said was that this must be peaceful. People were told that they didn’t have to be in the hunger strikes if they didn’t want to, or felt physically that they couldn’t do it. We told people they could still show support for the causes even if they choose to eat. That was very clear. I was translating [into French] and they said I was trying to incite because I was reading to the other people about the strike. They said they’d bring charges against me as a ringleader. I’m not a ringleader.” Oluwole came to the U.S. to seek asylum from political persecution in Nigeria.

In early October another hunger strike occurred in Jamaica, Queens, at the INS detention center run by the Wackenhut Correction Corp. This site holds people seeking asylum. According to Human Rights Watch, prior to the 1996 legislation, crimes in deportation were limited to murder, rape, and other serious felonies. With IIRIRA, minor drug offenses, some cases of drunk driving, shoplifting, and any conviction carrying a sentence of one year or longer, whether or not the sentence was suspended or actually served, required deportation. The law applies retroactively, so that someone arrested years ago, who has already served their sentence, is now considered a “criminal alien” and subject to detention and deportation.

The new laws also created a process called “expedited removal,” aimed at severely limiting the number of people allowed into the U.S. for political asylum. Now low-level INS employees have the authority to decide whether an immigrant’s claim for political asylum should even be considered, or whether they should be deported immediately. In the six months between August 1997 and January 1998, 60,000 people who tried to come into the U.S. were subject to expedited removal. Almost half (30,000) of those people withdrew their applications. The other 30,000 were placed in expedited removal proceedings. By the end of six months, all but one had been “removed”—deported out of the U.S. Expedited removal also means that immigrants seeking asylum are detained for months or even years while their cases are reviewed. Even if these immigrants pass through all the hurdles and are found to have a “credible fear” of persecution if they are deported (the official criteria for asylum) they can only be released at the discretion of the INS.

This has assembled a patchwork of detention centers to hold increasing numbers of immigrants. There are four different types of detention facilities: "service processing centers" run by the INS itself; "contracted centers" run by private prison companies; 19 Bureau of Prisons facilities; and local jails. The largest number of immigrants, 60 percent, are held in these local jails with regular prisoners. As of February 1998, the INS had contracts with 1,041 local jails to hold detainees.

New Laws Lead to Many More Detainees

The recent explosions in the number of detained immigrants is linked to repressive laws passed by Congress. The Anti-terrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act of 1996 (AEDPA) created new mandatory detention laws for certain immigrants and increased the number of crimes for which non-citizens can lose their legal status and be deported. The government labels such people as "criminal aliens." With AEDPA, a dozen or more immigration laws, hundreds of federal judges, INS officers and prison guards can tag any immigrant as a criminal alien and subject him or her to deportation. This has caused a dramatic increase in detention of immigrants, with the number of those in ICE custody jumping from 10,000 in 1996 to 40,000 in 1998.
Burying the Living at Tamms Supermax

Supermax. The word sounds like some flashy new corporate product. In reality, Supermax prisoners are brutal and high-tech dungeons whose function is to break a human being down through various forms of physical and psychological torment. One of the newest Supermax prisons is the Tamms Correctional Center in Illinois.

Recently, the Revolutionary Worker received a copy of a letter from Michael (Hamza Jabbar) Johnson. Earlier this year, Johnson was transferred from Menard prison into Tamms. We also spoke with his mother, Mary L. Johnson, a long-time activist against police brutality and for prisoners’ rights since Michael was beaten up by cops at age 17. It was Mary L.’s impassioned stand against police brutality and the notorious torturer Lt. Jon Burge that led to Michael’s persecution by the authorities. He was railroaded on two murder charges, the second after he was incarcerated. The following is drawn largely from the information and insights provided by Mary L. and Michael Johnson.

Day One

On the morning of April 1, Michael Johnson and three other inmates—fourth and hand chained “like wild animals”—were taken by van from Menard prison to Tamms. The four-hour trip was made under tight security: four C/Os (correctional officers) in the van and two more following in the car behind, armed with shotguns and vests. At Tamms, there was “a welcoming committee” which consisted of “a dozen guard officers” in fatigues and mile. Eight guards in bullet-proof vests took Michael and the others one at a time from the van and brought them to the glass doors of a concrete building.

Michael writes: “When the control booth officer opened the doors, we were escorted in, to where we could see four cells. Inside those cells were concrete stalls, weighing approximately 700 lb. each, with a chain ring, used to chain you down. Once you’re inside, they tell you: ‘We’re going to count to three and take you down to your knees.’ When they do this they take the ankle cuff off, count three to three and bring you to your feet again. Then they tell you to step into this cell, never taking their hands off you. The steel doors close, and a little chock lock locks around your hands. Then they take the cuff off and tell you to drop. As soon as a man walks through these glass doors, the psychological torture begins. You are made to get on your knees, then you are stripped of everything—your underwear, socks—they search you, fingers your hair, open your mouth, lift your tongue, top lip, bottom lip, behind the ears, lift your arms, wiggle your fingers, turn around, raise your left foot, your right foot, bend over, spread ’em.”

Day one at Tamms.

Fortress in an Economically Depressed Town

Tamms Correctional Center was built to be a small fortress—a 23-story compound surrounded by double rows of 12-foot-high cyclone fencing and razor ribbon, designed to hold 500 prisoners. It’s even got its own courtroom and execution chamber.

Burying the Living

At Tamms, your world is reduced to an 8 x 10’ prison cell—stark, barren, devoid of anything. “EVERYTHING IS GRAY CONCRETE!” writes Michael Johnson. “You can hear voices, but you NEVER SEE ANYONE!”

“When you try to sleep at night...they turn the light on every 30 minutes, all night long.”

“They search our cells at least every seven days, and each time we have to sub to this humiliating strip search. You’re put down on your knees, lift your tongue, top lip, bottom lip, behind the ears, lift your arms, wiggle your fingers, turn around, raise your left foot, your right foot, bend over, spread ’em.”

Day one at Tamms.

Some People May Never Leave

“Tamms is not about rehabilitation, it’s about punishment...most people may never leave.” These are the words of George Welbourne, the current warden of Tamms. Welbourne was a consultant on the construction of Tamms, and he toured the yard—an empty 12’ x 30’ mesh-covered concrete box. Newcomers get only one hour of exercise time a week. After seven months, an inmate may earn the “privilege” of one hour a day. Visitors—if and when allowed—must be seen behind glass doors, and the conversations are monitored. Phone calls are not permitted.

“This is what you do to human beings,” said Mary L. “When you want to dehumanize them and take their last bit of dignity they have away from them.”

“I see all Supermaxes, not just Tamms, as a way to introduce the death penalty by burying the living. As far as life is concerned, they dead. You can even touch a corpse—but you can’t touch these people.”

Mary L. and Michael Johnson

Fighting for What’s Right

If the authorities intended to intimidate and silence Mary L., Michael and others who dare to stand up, they have failed. Michael continues to strongly declare his commitment to justice and to speak out against the inhuman conditions behind the prison walls. And Mary L., determined to fight for her son and all other victims of this system, is fully prepared to face any force they may throw at her if they try to stop me. I’m fighting for justice, that’s a hopeless cause. Cause I won’t never do that. I can’t stop fighting for what’s right.”

“A prisoner in his cell at Tamms.

“Tamms is not about rehabilitation, it’s about punishment...most people may never leave.”

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Prisoners who are transferred to Tamms must stay there for at least a year—there is no maximum length of stay. In the words of prison and government officials, those sent to Tamms are the “most violent and troublesome” prisoners. Some inmates are classified as “disciplinary segregation” for violating prison rules. Others are considered “administrative detainees”—punished not for anything they’ve done, but just for what the authorities suspect they might do.

Who actually ends up at Tamms is another story. In a letter to the Prison Action Committee newsletter, one Tamms inmate says that before his transfer, he was listed as a “medium security/moderate escape risk.” He was even working in the prison kitchen, where he helped prepare meals for the prison officers. The prisoner believes the real reason for his transfer to Tamms is his law suit against the warden of his previous prison.

Michael Johnson is at Tamms under administrative detention—for alleged gang affiliation and drug dealing while at Menard prison. Michael writes: “I’ve never bought, sold or solicited anyone else to buy or sell drugs (for myself or anyone else). I’ve never turned down a drug test or any other test I went to school the entire time that I was there, made good grades, and would have still been in school, if the IDOC [Illinois Department of Corrections] hadn’t decided that education was too much of a luxury for men in prison.

I’m still trying to find out why I’m here,” Michael writes, “being subjected to these mind numbing, plus the psychological and physical torture. If I wasn’t a problem for the IDOC for 11 years, why did you suddenly come and get me in the wee hours of the morning, chain me up like a wild animal, lock me in a dungeon and then say all those negative things about me—things that you KNOW aren’t true? I’m still trying to get ANSWERS, so in the meantime, I’ll continue to exercise my mind, body and spirit.”

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