

# Wisconsin Department of Corrections force-feeds hunger strikers

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7 July 2016

On June 17, state's attorney Gloria Thomas, on behalf of the Wisconsin Department of Corrections and DOC secretary Jon Litscher, petitioned Dodge County Circuit Court Judge Brian Pfitzinger to permit the force-feeding of inmates at Waupun, Columbia, Green Bay and other state prisons, where some half dozen men or more initiated a hunger strike on or about June 5th.

Pfitzinger granted the petition and ordered the "temporary" forced nasogastric tube hydration and feeding for at least two of the strikers, Cesar DeLeon and LaRon McKinley Bey. The six known participants in the hunger strike include DeLeon, McKinley Bey, Joshua Scolman, Parish Golden, Lamar Larry, and Shirell Watkins.

The prisoners have titled their hunger strike "Dying to Live Humanitarian Food Refusal Campaign Against Torture," aware as they are of the US Constitution's 8th Amendment which prohibits cruel and unusual punishment.

For years, prisoners have protested the DOC's policy of placing them in solitary confinement for extended periods. McKinley Bey has informed media outlets and courts that his time in uninterrupted solitary at Waupun state prison exceeds a quarter century.

Multiple media sources report that approximately 100 Wisconsin inmates are living now in long term solitary. UN officials have declared that any time in solitary over 15 days constitutes torture.

Inmates held in the "hole" and in the general population have also reported beatings by sadistic guards, confinement in cold cells for many weeks with scant or no clothing, the provision of contaminated drinking water and rotten food, receiving poor or no treatment for medical and mental needs, and never being allowed outside.

The prisoners also report that punishment is meted out for their exposing these prison practices to their families,

the courts, the media and prison advocacy groups. Prison wardens and staffs have been sued many times by the inmates and their families, to no avail, given the consistent protection prison officials receive from the state.

Judge Pfitzinger received a petition authored by Dr. Jeffery Manlove, the Waupun prison consulting physician, on June 17, which stated, "He (DeLeon) is showing signs of significant dehydration. He appears weak, gaunt, and has an unsteady gait. His mucous membranes are very dry. He has a rapid heart rate of 132. His lab tests results are consistent with dehydration and metabolic acidosis."

In his report, Dr. Manlove also noted that DeLeon's weight had fallen from 206 pounds to 186 pounds between January and June. Judge Pfitzinger then ordered the force-feedings.

After Pfitzinger issued the order DeLeon wrote a reply to the court, which reveals, among other things, the undoubted and legitimate legal and "ethical" anxiety felt by prison medical staff.

He wrote, "The prison doctor from Waupun submitted some exaggerated report about me been (sic) in immediate danger and so forth. I'm here to tell you that Waupun officials are trying to dupe you into believing (sic) this lie to stop me and other inmates from continuing our 'religious fasting' because we been making the news for the past 10 days."

The reply continued, "The same doctor...came to my cell a day before and wisper (sic)...that the warden...was putting pressure on him to declare us being in immediate danger because the DOC secretary was calling...him (the warden)...to do whatever it takes to stop us. He, the doctor, ask me to eat or else he was going to have to go with what the warden ask him to do."

DeLeon and McKinley Bey appeared before Dodge Circuit Court Judge Steven Bauer on June 30th to oppose

being force-fed, reminding the court of their 8th Amendment rights. DeLeon asked that the court view a video of his being force-fed “for a punitive purpose, not medical,” a recording that he submitted in a motion. Judge Bauer told DeLeon that he had not received the video, and agreed to schedule a follow-up hearing for viewing; meanwhile, forced feedings would continue.

The DOC attorney Thomas flippantly dismissed DeLeon’s assertions of abuse, saying, “If there is an implication of an 8th Amendment violation then that is up to the court.”

McKinley Bey told Judge Bauer the same day, “I am refusing to eat and drink for political reasons and to protect myself. I am going to refuse to eat and drink as long as they mistreat me. I have suffered all kinds of medical conditions. I am doing this to protest long-term solitary confinement.”

He reported that he is in his cell 164 of 168 hours in a week, all told for 27 1/2 years. He added in court, “I’m prepared to go long-term with this.” Judge Bauer responded by issuing a “permanent” order for McKinley Bey’s nasogastric tube feeding, effective until December 29, 2016.

McKinley Bey reported that force-feeding is conducted by strapping inmates into a “restraint” chair. A guard inserts the nasogastric tube into the nose and down the throat while another guard films the event.

Norman C. Green, also known as Prince Aturn-Ra Uhuru Mutawakki, formerly incarcerated at Waupun but moved to Columbia state prison in Portage, Wisconsin in an effort by DOC authorities to break the strike, is also being force-fed. He reports having lived in the “hole” for 18 years.

Prison authorities also began an attempt at the forced feeding of Joshua Scolman, the exact date unknown, but because of an apparent deviated septum (a crooked mid nose bone and cartilage) attempts to place the tube caused bleeding at the prison that could not be stopped. Scolman was then taken to an area hospital for treatment and IV therapies. One unconfirmed source reported that the DOC considered forcing Scolman to undergo a surgical tube placement through the abdominal wall directly into the stomach, to circumvent the nasal issue.

In April of this year, a Waupun inmate named Robert Tatum went on a hunger strike for 14 days after filing a suit against the DOC for abuse by the guards, a litigation that went nowhere. He quit the strike when threatened with tube feedings, after which the guards force fed him anyway. In a revealing statement, the DOC

communications director Tristan Cook declared that Waupun was following DOC-approved procedures.

Correct nasogastric tube placement in the stomach, especially repeatedly, forcibly, or by hostile amateurs, let alone by trained professionals, is not considered by the medical profession as being risk-free or entirely benign. And it is certainly understood to be exceptionally painful.

Complications include nasal, throat and esophageal irritation, bleeding and membrane tearing, as well as the risk of infusing nutrient fluids into the human airway, causing either pneumonia and/or asphyxiation. With force-feeding, lungs have also been punctured with resulting lung collapse, a life-threatening and surgical emergency.

In October 2015 the American Medical Association’s Journal of Ethics and J. Wesley Boyd of Harvard Medical School stated unambiguously that “force-feeding prisoners is wrong” in a review of this dangerous and barbaric practice.

Dr. Boyd noted in his article that the Israeli government authorized the force-feeding of hunger striking Palestinian prisoners last year, and, wanting to obtain the collaboration of medical professionals, the Israeli Public Security minister attempted to portray the fasting prisoners as “suicide terrorists.” The Israeli Medical Association would have none of it and informed the government that if it enacted such practices the Medical Association would request its member physicians refuse to participate.

Moreover, the World Medical Association, founded in the wake of WWII, updated its recommendations for prisoner treatment in the so-called Malta revisions of 2006. The revisions explicitly forbid force-feeding, which the group likened to “inhuman and degrading treatment,” that is “never ethically acceptable.” The medical associations of over 80 countries adhere to WMA guidance. The WMA also pointed out that hunger strikers are not suicidal, “but are a last resort way of expressing protest or dissent in situations of coercion.”



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