US prison strike enters second week amid media blackout

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Prisoners in across the United States are in the second week of their strike as solidarity rallies have been held in many locations. The strike, which began August 21 and is set to last a total of 19 days, has been largely ignored by the mainstream media, and reliable information about the strike's progress has been scant.

What information that has emerged has been provided by various anarchist groups reporting on the strike and in touch with inmates. The Facebook and Twitter pages of the Anarchist Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), the Anarchist Black Cross, as well as Itsgoingdown.org, a web site dedicated to supporting the uprising, have documented strike actions by prisoners across the US.

On August 9, prisoners in New Mexico began their strike early, in response to the brutal and dehumanizing conditions imposed upon them. Writing on Twitter, a supporter of the strike affiliated with the Incarcerated Workers Organizing Committee (IWOC), a branch of the IWW, described some of the treatment meted out to inmates that prompted their rebellion:

"[C]onditions at GEO Group prison reached a tipping point and the strike took place early due to administration cutting family visits, harassing families, strip searching elder family members, and STIU [Security Threat Intelligence Unit] targeting, harassing, and abusing inmates. 3 housing units joined in this movement to take a stand against the cruel conditions. Retaliation is ongoing."

As of August 20, all of New Mexico's 11 prisons were placed on "lockdown"—where all prisoners in a facility are confined to their cells—as collective punishment for the work stoppages and to prevent further organizing amongst inmates.

In South Carolina, there have been reports of widespread participation in the strike, and facilities there are rumored to be on lockdown. At McCormick Correctional Institution in that state, IWOC has reported that the entire prison population has stopped work, with the exception of 12-15 prisoners in the "privileged" unit, a section reserved for informants.

The *Guardian* reported that earlier this week in North Carolina approximately 100 prisoners at Hyde Correctional Institution engaged in a demonstration in the prison yard, carrying signs calling for parole, better food and solidarity. In Florida, home to 143 prisons, there have been reports of up to 11 prisons participating in the strike. This has been denied by state Department of Corrections officials. Inmates in Alabama are also reported to be participating in the strike.

In Washington, detained immigrant workers at the Northwest Detention Center (NWDC), a private immigration prison in Tacoma, are participating in the strike. Prisoners there are victims of the Trump administration's fascistic immigration policies. It has been reported that more than 200 inmates are engaged in a work stoppage and hunger strike. There have been some 15 hunger strikes at NWDC since 2014.

Twenty inmates incarcerated at the Sterling Correctional Facility in Colorado began a hunger strike August 20. The 20 men are among a group of 38 who are being held in the solitary confinement wing of the prison, some for as long as three months. They have issued five demands, including an end to collective punishment in which an entire racial group, usually Hispanics, are placed on lockdown in retaliation for the acts of a single individual. According to the statement released by the inmates, 20 to 100 inmates can be placed in solitary confinement indefinitely at any given time.

The Colorado inmates have also called for the state to abolish solitary confinement, abide by a recent court

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ruling ordering the state to allow inmates in segregation access to the outdoors, to refund inmate money spent on electronic tablets that were later recalled by the state, and to expand educational programs.

The strike has also spread to Canada, where inmates at Burnside jail in Halifax, Nova Scotia have expressed solidarity with their American counterparts and released their own set of demands, which include better healthcare, food and rehabilitation programs.

There have been additional reports of inmates in Ohio, Arizona, and California engaging in hunger strikes.

Nationally, there have been rallies held in support of the striking prisoners in Richmond, Virginia; Columbia, South Carolina; New York; Boston; Seattle; and Lansing, Michigan. Additionally, there have been widespread reports of "banner drops," large signs placed in public places such as overpasses, in support of the prisoners. Pro-strike graffiti has also been seen in cities across the country.

Internationally, the strike has attracted support from other prisoners. A statement of solidarity was issued by 6,000 imprisoned Palestinian prisoners from the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, jailed for their opposition to the colonialist policies of the Israeli state. The statement read in part: "[W]e extend our solidarity to the prisoners in the jails of the United States participating in the national prison strike beginning on August 21, fighting exploitation, racism, and capitalism from within the heart of imperialist prisons. ...The prison strike is a struggle of oppressed and exploited workers, first and foremost, confronting the unmasked brutality of capitalism behind bars. Around the world, prisoners have only protected their human rights and won victories through struggle."

Addressing the international dimensions of the strike, the statement goes on to say: "Today, prison workers are some of the most exploited workers in the United States, and the same ruling class that profits from the confiscation of Palestinian land and resources and from the bombing of children in Yemen also profits from the forced labor of prisoners. Your struggle is a workers' struggle that is part of our global conflict against the vicious exploitation that our peoples face today."

Strike organizers in various prisons across the country have been moved into solitary confinement. In June, Ronald Brooks, a prisoner at the notorious Angola prison in Louisiana was transferred to the equally brutal David Wade Correctional Center after making a pro-strike video and organizing in support of the strike.

In July, Siddique Hassan, a prisoner at the Southern Ohio Correctional Facility in Lucasville, was reportedly punished for his strike organizing activity by having his phone privileges removed for a year. Inmates within the facility have reported that prison officials went so far as to place sandbags along the front of Hassan's cell to prevent him from communicating with other inmates.

Hassan, a leader of the 2016 prison strike, has been on death row in Ohio since 1993 for his participation in the Lucasville prison uprising, where inmates rebelled against the conditions they were being held under. Nine prisoners and one guard were killed in the course of the incident, and inmates who participated in the uprising have been targeted by corrections officials since then.

The strike being conducted by prisoners today follows the 2016 strike, the largest in US history. At that time, an estimated 24,000 inmates participated in the strike across prisons in 20 states. Just as now, the inmates at that time demanded an end to modern-day slavery, better living conditions, and an end to the reactionary laws which mandate long prison sentences and prevent inmates from being paroled.

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