

Inmates at two CoreCivic private prisons in Arizona protest inhumane living conditions following power outage

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Inmates at two private prisons are speaking out against dangerous conditions after their facilities in Eloy, Arizona lost primary power following recent storms, the Arizona Department of Corrections (DOC) confirmed Monday night.

La Palma Correctional Center and the Red Rock Correctional Center are both operated by private prison company CoreCivic and contracted by the state of Arizona. It is claimed by the DOC that generators are providing the power needed for air conditioning at these facilities, but these claims are contradicted by the inmates.

Inmates at both facilities explained to the *Arizona Republic* how the power outage has greatly impacted living conditions. One prisoner at La Palma said, “They won't crack our doors for airflow, and they are keeping us locked in the stifling cells.” An inmate at Red Rock stated, “We have no phone calls, no TV, can't cook basically just sitting ducks... We been on lock down since last night. They are saying that it will be three days before they get power back on.”

Summers in Arizona are dry and swelteringly hot, with temperatures ranging anywhere from 90 to 120 degrees Fahrenheit (32 to 49 Celsius). During the summer months, climate control in these facilities is vital for creating a safe living environment. These temperatures lead to increased chances of inmates suffering from heat-related illnesses, which can damage the brain and other vital organs, sometimes fatally.

There is a higher proportion of mental illness and chronic health conditions among inmates when compared to the general public, which exacerbates the risks associated with heat-related illnesses. Additionally, there is a growing proportion of older

inmates in the prison population, who are at increased risk of succumbing to heat-related illnesses as well.

The state of Arizona, like the rest of the United States, has a history of neglecting basic human rights of prison inmates. US District Judge Roslyn Silver ruled in 2019 that Arizona prisons were in violation of constitutional rights due to inadequate mental health care. Silver issued this decision on June 30th 2019, writing that, “Defendants have failed to provide, and continue to refuse to provide, a constitutionally adequate medical care and mental healthcare system for all prisoners.” She continued, “Defendants’ years of inaction are acting with deliberate indifference to the substantial risk of serious harm posed by the lack of adequate medical and mental healthcare affecting all prisoners.”

The United States prison population is the largest in the world with, two million incarcerated in jail or prison. Despite containing close to 5 percent of the world's population, the US accounts for 20 percent of the world's prison population.

The conditions inmates are forced to live in are often overcrowded, unsanitary, and lacking adequate medical care or nutritious food. These conditions facilitated the rapid spread of COVID-19, which, according to The Covid Prison Project, has infected more than 600,000 inmates and killed nearly three thousand. These conditions continue to facilitate the rapid spread of the deadly virus in prisons, despite the ruling class's claims that the pandemic is over. This February, inmates in a North Carolina prison went on a hunger strike to protest abuse and lack of medical care.

In addition to these deplorable living conditions, inmates also face intense abuse, with researchers

believing that at any given time there are roughly 61,000 inmates in solitary confinement, a method of punishment considered torture by the United Nations. The effects of this inhumane practice can include permanent psychological damage.

The exploitation and abuse of the working class is magnified in the prison system. Prisoners are also subjected to forced labor for either extremely meager wages or none at all, barely paid enough to purchase essential items they need to survive from the same people selling many of their basic necessities at marked up prices.

The lack of humane living conditions in prisons is an international reality, with Julian Assange, a political prisoner of US imperialism, being deprived of basic medical necessities in Belmarsh prison in Britain where he awaits extradition.

Last year, twenty-one New Zealand inmates at the Waikeria Prison started a protest against heinous living conditions that resulted in a six-day standoff between prisoners and guards. The protesters claimed they had to wait months for medical treatment, as well as having to wear the same dirty clothes for months on end.

Recently, barbaric prison conditions in Sri Lanka were revealed by the Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka, which published an extensive report based on investigations conducted between April and September 2018. The report found cells which were small, overcrowded, and lacking proper ventilation, leaving inmates vulnerable to extreme temperatures. According to the report, all of these factors amount to “inhumane living conditions.” Prisoners in Haiti are being starved to death due to a cutback in already meager rations.

As climate change increases extreme weather conditions, climate control in prisons becomes a more pressing issue. Currently, the historic heat wave in Europe is posing a grave danger to inmates in poorly ventilated and non-air conditioned cells in the UK. Kevan Thakrar, a prisoner in Belmarsh, explained the experience of the heat wave to openDemocracy, saying, “The headaches and dehydration caused by the heat can be intense.” He also described how, “Within segregation units, it is common practice to have to endure extreme temperatures... I have spent weeks in bed wearing two full tracksuits to keep warm, and weeks naked, feeling too weak to move from the heat.”

Laws were enacted in the 1980s and 1990s by both

Democratic and Republican administrations that exponentially increased the US prison population, particularly advocated by then-Senator Joe Biden. Democratic rights came under sharp attack, arbitrary mandatory minimum sentences were deployed, and new drug laws were written vastly increasing the number of non-violent criminals facing incarceration, all in the name of being “tough on crime.”

This goes hand-in-hand with the savage attacks on immigrants, the militarization of the border and police, and the “let it rip” COVID-19 policy that has resulted in the death or crippling of millions.

The dramatic expansion of the US prison system is a policy of class oppression. While criminals on Wall Street, pandemic profiteers and corrupt politicians are rarely convicted, impoverished workers, desperate immigrants and the homeless are locked away. The only way to put an end to all of this unnecessary human suffering and exploitation is through the politically independent mobilization of the international working class to reorganize society to meet human need instead of private profit. This means taking up the fight for socialism.



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