

the ending of racism, sexism, and poverty in this country before we begin tearing down the walls. It may be in our own self-interest.

2.B.3.

North Carolina Prisoners' Labor Union

From "Goals of the North Carolina Prisoners' Labor Union" (1974)

Throughout the early 1970s, incarcerated people formed unions to address a wide range of grievances. Perhaps the most determined such initiative took place in North Carolina, where state officials expressed deep hostility to unions in general, much less ones in prison. Nevertheless, eleven prisoners signed on to this document laying out their grievances, demands, and approach. The prisoners ended up taking their case, *Jones v. NCPLU*, to the Supreme Court in 1977, which ruled against them. The ruling essentially squashed the prisoner union movement.

For centuries persons charged and convicted of crimes have been looked upon and treated as less than human beings. This is true today in spite of the fact that current knowledge of society and its patterns of law enforcement teach us that law violations occur among a vastly larger number of persons than those convicted and imprisoned. Moreover, the prisoner, the convict, and ex-convict are treated with extreme hostility and oppression more often because they are poor or members of racial minorities than because they are persons who are actually less deserving of human respect and dignity.

We do not deny that society has a right to punish by imprisonment for law violations, but we submit that this punishment should be imposed by the judicial branch and that prisoners are not sent to prison *for* punishment, but rather, *as* punishment. It is further submitted that this punishment should not be arbitrarily increased or harshened by the prison administration against those few it chooses to separate as "incurrigibles." Moreover, we accept the philosophy of punishment *only* within reasonable periods of time and *only* after conviction of wrongdoing. Beyond this, society should have *no* other rights over the convicted person.

Therefore, we are committed to altering or removing those "correctional" practices which are in conflict with just constitutional and social interests of all persons. The practices which we are primarily concerned at this time fall into the following general categories:

1. *Economic exploitation*: in North Carolina prisoners are forced to supply labor for the state without salary, rights, or other compensation and benefits normally guaranteed workers.

2. *Denial of human and civil rights*: the prisoners imprisoned and incarcerated in the North Carolina Department of Corrections are being mistreated and denied a multitude of basic civil rights. This is completely unnecessary and unjust.
3. *Indeterminate sentencing*: in North Carolina many prisoners are sentenced under an indeterminate sentence system. They are held for indefinite lengths of time, not knowing when they will be released. They have their sentences determined upon irrelevant, arbitrary, or unconstitutional criteria. Furthermore, once determined, their sentences may be again revoked without any new charges being brought against them in due process procedure.
4. *Rehabilitation and return to society*: the present system of rehabilitation of prisoners in the state of North Carolina's Department of Corrections is being applied to only a select few. Thereby, the interests of society as a whole in the rehabilitation process are being neglected insofar as the majority of inmates in prison are only being punished rather than being aided in developing socially beneficial patterns of behavior.

Based upon the foregoing concerns, the North Carolina Prisoners' Union is committed to work towards the following:

1. *An end to employment without reasonable compensation or wage. . . .*
2. *An end to employment without workers' compensation or benefits. . . .*
3. *An end to brutal treatment on the part of prison staffs. . . .*
4. *An end to inferior, insufficient, and inadequate medical treatment and attention. . . .*
5. *An end to the refusal to have an "in-house" law library and legal service. . . .*
6. *An end to the denial of full civil rights upon release. . . .*
7. *An end to arbitrary indeterminate sentences and the mode of their imposition. . . .* In some indeterminate sentence cases prisoners do not receive notification of a release date until they have nearly completed their time. Though a rehabilitative rationale is often used to justify this practice, it is clear that the maximization of conformity and docility is more frequently the basis for such action. This practice results in extreme hardship and mental torture for the prisoner and *must* be halted. The foregoing abuses defeat, we submit, the positive potential within the indeterminate sentencing system, and therefore, such a system must be abolished altogether.
8. *An end to the current practices of the Board of Parole.* Records verify that the Parole Board has not been granting paroles based on assessment of the merits of behavior but rather upon the provisions of what connections an inmate might have. Standards and guidelines as to the granting of paroles and recommendations for commutations should be drawn up and strictly adhered to, without special treatment granted due to political connections. Further, all prisoners must be given due process of law and procedural matters. It is mandatory that a prisoner who has shown

that he/she is entitled to parole consideration be given this consideration without undue delay or excuse.

9. *An end to the denial of gain time without just cause or due process of law.* The North Carolina Department of Corrections for many years has ignored the North Carolina General Statute s/s 14-265 which provides commutation of sentence for Sunday work. This relief, in particular, must be accorded to all imprisoned, as must all other commutations of sentence allowed under existing laws and statutes of the state. Moreover, a commutation of time for extra work performed is a right and cannot be taken away from a prisoner by the prison personnel.
10. *An end to the contract programs due to violations of the agreements.* As it exists now, the prisoner performs the duties and obligations of the contract and rather than receiving his/her merited reward he/she is simply given another contract to be fulfilled. This must be accepted upon penalty of being locked up with all privileges denied. The Department of Corrections is using job contracts and numerous other programs as behavior modification techniques to control the inmate population. The inmates must be made aware of these methods, and the union will expose such practices in the effort to impede or stop such abuses.
11. *An end to the denial of procedural due process of law. . . .*
12. *An end to disciplinary hearings regarding violations which are alleged on the basis of hearsay or suspicion. . . .*
13. *An end to the denial of justified and merited privileges without reason. . . .*
14. *An end to the construction of high-rise maximum security prisons. . . .*
15. *An end to discriminatory sentences based on economic or racial background.* The judicial-prison-parole-industrial complex places unrealistic and harsh prison sentences on persons largely from the poor classes while those with wealth go free. We recognize that this is merely a reflection of society at large and the social and economic prejudices rampant within it. However, we recognize our responsibility to work towards changing this through educational techniques and other appropriate measures.
16. *An end to the disparity in sentencing, by the courts. . . .*
17. *An end to capital punishment.*

Strategies

Through the North Carolina Prisoners' Union there will be a wide variety of strategies pursued to achieve the above-stated goals. At present we will concentrate on the following tactics:

- A. Organize a state-wide unified, multiracial prisoners' union at every prison in North Carolina which can work efficiently and dedicatedly towards our goals, with collective strength.
- B. Direct outside members of the union and community support groups

- to appear before the legislature to provide more complete information about prisons and the treatment of prisoners.
- C. Educate the public through the news media, union newsletters or publications, and public speaking engagements.
 - D. Retain attorneys to help gain our objectives through the courts.
 - E. Use peaceful, lawful, and legal methods to obtain fair treatment and due process of law for all prisoners of the state of North Carolina.
 - F. Collectively bargain with prison administrations and administrators.

Southern Coalition on Jails and Prisons, 1974–1990

Lydia Pelot-Hobbs

In 1974, as the United States embarked on the political project that would become known as mass incarceration, free-world activists organized the Southern Coalition on Jails and Prisons (SCJP) to resist the growing use of criminalization and imprisonment. The SCJP was formed as a regional organization, and at its height in the early 1980s it had chapters in Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Tennessee. Between 1974 and its demise in 1990, the SCJP focused on four primary issues: reforming prison and jail conditions to ensure the rights of prisoners, halting new prison construction, abolishing capital punishment, and developing alternatives to incarceration.

To meet these goals, the coalition employed a range of tactics. For instance, as part of its activism to reform prison and jail conditions it filed civil action lawsuits along with supporting prisoner strikes and other forms of resistance, such as the North Carolina Prisoners' Union's struggle for official recognition as a union. SCJP understood its constituency to be both friends and family of incarcerated people as well as radicals and progressives without a direct relationship to the penal system but whose politics poised them to be sympathetic to SCJP's aims of countering state punishment with social justice. It established support groups of family and friends of incarcerated people, coordinated carpools for prison visits, and petitioned governors for prison reforms. Through newsletters and conferences, its members strove to inform and mobilize people around the everyday and extraordinary forms of carceral violence, from inadequate health care to solitary confinement to guard beatings. SCJP worked in alliance with legal organizations such as the ACLU and the Southern Prisoners Defense Committee as well as liberal religious groups on lawsuits addressing prison conditions and in advocating for ending the death penalty. The group understood itself to be a regional branch of a national movement against imprisonment and linked itself with organizations such as the National Prison Moratorium Project and Stop the Olympic Prison in Lake Placid, New York.