

## America's Political Prisoners

The Dehumanization of the Victims by a Political System to further its Own Ends

By [J. B. Gerald](#)

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*As a society becomes criminal in wars of conquest, crimes of aggression and genocide are mirrored within the society's treatment of its own. Imprisonments under mechanisms of the "war on terror" extend concern for political prisoners to prisoners of war, "enemy combatants," and all who fall into the current machinery of persecution, prison, and what the middle classes are gradually realizing is the torture of prolonged solitary confinement. The unifying element in this summary of recent news, is the dehumanization of the victims, by a political system to further its own ends, which are increasingly anti-human.*

New York:

The Center for Constitutional Rights is furthering "No Separate Justice: a Post-9/11 Domestic Human Rights Campaign ," to vigil at the Metropolitan Correctional Center (MCC) the first Monday of each month starting February. Prisoners detained under "war on terror" measures are held there for years, some in solitary confinement. Prolonged solitary confinement is recognized as torture. The Feb. 3rd vigil focuses on Fahad Hashmi who faced a 70 year sentence for storing a friend's luggage containing clothing for Al-Qaueda. He is serving 15 years in Colorado on a plea bargain. CCR says he has been held in solitary confinement seven years.

Knoxville Tennessee:

Elders Sister Megan Rice, Michael Walli, and Greg Boertje-Obed <sup>i</sup> were to be sentenced Jan. 28th for entering the Oak Ridge Y-12 National Security Complex, which processes uranium for bombs. The trespass embarrassed the facility's security company. Refusing a plea bargain, the three were convicted of sabotage for cutting a hole in the fence and symbolic acts of writing, pouring their blood, and hammering on a stone. Judge Amul Thapar has ordered they pay \$52,953 damages. They should be released but face sentences of up to thirty years. Taken to the court in shackles Sr. Rice is almost 84; according to their lawyer she is "freezing cold in jail." Due to a snowstorm the sentencing was delayed until February. <sup>ii</sup>

Menard Illinois:

On January 15th about 21 prisoners at the Menard Correctional Center High Security Unit entered a hunger strike peacefully protesting conditions at Menard and asking for basic personal rights (ie. access to nail clippers). The protest was met with intimidation, deprivation

of prisoner belongings, alleged beatings off camera, assault with injury to Armando Velasquez.<sup>iii</sup>

Coleman Florida:

James Anaya, UN Special rapporteur on Indigenous rights met with Leonard Peltier in prison. The rapporteur has previously requested Peltier's freedom but efforts for executive clemency have been ignored.<sup>iv</sup> Peltier's case clarifies a betrayal by the Justice Department and Judiciary of rights struggled for by generations of Americans.

Shediac New Brunswick:

Micmaq Warriors imprisoned from a raid on their encampment October 17th<sup>v</sup> are being refused their spiritual right to worship, at the Southeast Regional Correctional Center. Denied access to sage for smudging, the Land Defenders Aaron Francis and Germain Jr Breau remain in prison without trial. Six Micmaq Warriors were initially detained. Denied access to a spiritual elder and spiritual rights they were allowed to see the Center's Christian chaplain; the prayer groups were based on the Bible...<sup>vi</sup>

Guantanamo Bay:

A report from Reprieve (U.K.) Jan. 12th 2014, reveals 33 prisoners currently on hunger strike with 16 being force-fed. Under conditions at Guantanamo the men simply want to die. Guantanamo's chain of command has committed a war crime. Hunger strikers are assigned to the most penurious Camp V Echo. 155 Guantanamo prisoners remain, with 77 who wait though cleared for release.<sup>vii</sup>

Vancouver:

Lucia Vega Jimenez, a Mexican hotel worker, accused of not paying her bus fare (do the buses give receipts ?) and subsequently robbed of several thousand dollars, was imprisoned, then held at Vancouver International Airport's Canadian Border Services holding cells for deportation back to Mexico. The facility allows no visits from lawyers, family or religious personnel. She died in custody, age 42. Media sources indicate she was found hanging in a shower stall for some time. Canada Border Services contracts out the facility's security to a private company, "Genesis Security." The RCMP finds no indication of a crime. A priest providing 'last rights' at the hospital confirmed her death a suicide. News of the death was entirely suppressed for a month before release.<sup>viii</sup>

Colombia:

FARC (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia) has requested the release of Simon Trinidad, a former lawyer and a FARC leader. The U.S. extradited him to the States and holds him in a maximum security Colorado penitentiary on a 60 year sentence with no parole.<sup>ix</sup> The request was made during recent peace talks held in Cuba. FARC's spokesman, Ivan Marquez, said Simon Trinidad for ten years is held in solitary, not allowed a newspaper or book or cards to play solitaire; an emergency appeal was made for the attention of human rights organizations.<sup>x</sup> The treatment of Trinidad, familiar in U.S. prison treatment

which may hold as many as 80,000 prisoners in solitary confinement, is not included in sentencing but an extra-judicial initiative to destroy a person's mind, will, understanding. In this instance the treatment is a war crime.<sup>xi</sup>

In all instances, the prisoners are victims of the State, political prisoners persecuted for political purposes. Without a codified definition of "political prisoner" recognized by law enforcement and judicial systems of North America, – without admitting that some are imprisoned simply because they are a threat to power, society accedes to the injustice. People who break no laws for their personal advancement become "criminals" for affirming the interests of humanity.

The State criminalizes that portion of the population which insists on necessary change. As the State becomes more unjust, as economic interests supersede human necessities, as extremes of poverty and wealth replace a common interest, more people go to prison, with longer sentences. The profits of the prison industry which increasingly uses forced labour (slavery) on production lines for Starbucks, MacDonalds, Boeing, Victoria's Secret,<sup>xii</sup> are second to the State's control of the general population by fear of prison.

Use of law enforcement to control the population loses the connection between law and justice. When people are denied legal recourse to counter crimes of the powerful in court they turn to "politics" and become targets for surveillance, false arrests, incitement, 'set-ups', sting operations, entrapment. The injustice undermines respect for law as an agreement among free people.

In the U.S. the importance of high profile political prisoners such as Leonard Peltier and Mumia Abu-Jamal has multiplied a hundred fold since the 1980's. In a sense political prisoners are becoming the people's power plants. The targeting of Black Panthers by COINTELPRO, the destruction of the American Indian Movement leadership, the persecution which continues past prosecution into extrajudicial punishment within the prison system, were once accepted as standard – the American way. Currently the norm is deeply questioned by any standard of human rights.

Political prisoners may be a step ahead of the people. Some put aside their fear of a system which threatens everyone within it, to say and do what's needed for human survival. Under oppression everyone becomes a political prisoner.

## Notes

<sup>i</sup> "2013 suppressed news," June 14, 2013, [nightslantern.ca](http://nightslantern.ca) [access:< <http://nightslantern.ca/2013bulletin.htm#14jun> >].

<sup>ii</sup> "Judge Orders Activists to Pay Full Restitution," Travis Loller (AP), Jan. 27, 2014, ABC News; "Snow delays sentencing for Tennessee nuclear facility break-in," Melodi Erdogan (Reuters), Jan. 28, 2014, Chicago Tribune.

<sup>iii</sup> "Menard hunger strikers endure beating, threats by nurses but vow, 'We will not let them break us'," Alice Lynd, Jan. 26, 2014, SFBayView; "Update from Menard hunger strikers: We need outside support, force feeding threatened," Alice Lynd, and "Menard prisoners' demands," Alan Mills, Jan 21, 2014, SFBayView.

<sup>iv</sup> “UN Special Rapporteur Meets with Leonard Peltier in Prison,” Levi Rickert, Jan 24, 2014, TulaLipNews.com; “Night’s Lantern Political Prisoner Updates,” nightslantern.ca [access:< <http://nightslantern.ca/prison/2prisoners.htm#lp> >].

<sup>v</sup> “2013 suppressed news,” Oct. 19, 2013, nightslantern.ca [access:< <http://nightslantern.ca/2013bulletin.htm#19oct> >].

<sup>vi</sup> “Jailed Mi’kmaq Warriors Denied Access To Spiritual Practises,” Jan. 21, 2014, Warrior Publications; “Coady Stevens, Mi’kmaq Warrior, speaks on conditions in New Brunswick prison,” Miles Howe, Jan. 23, 2014, Halifax Media Co-op.

<sup>vii</sup> “Number on Guantanamo Hunger Strike Doubles in under a Month,” Reprieve, Jan 12, 2014, Global Research; “Political Prisoner Updates,” nightslantern.ca [access:< <http://nightslantern.ca/prison/2prisoners.htm#g> >].

<sup>viii</sup> “Mexican woman who died after CBSA arrest hung herself rather than be deported,” Kim Pemberton, Jan. 28, 2014, The Vancouver Sun; “Action alert: Death of Lucia Vega Jimenez in migrant detention,” Jan. 29, 2014, no one is illegal; “Mexican woman dies in Canada Border Services custody,” David P. Ball, Jan. 27, 2014, Vancouver 24 hours; “Mexican woman who died after being detained at YVR reportedly arrested over unpaid transit ticket,” Amy Judd and Peter Meiszner, Jan. 29, 2014, Global Toronto; “Death before deportation,” Jan. 30, 2014, As It Happens /CBC.

<sup>ix</sup> Simon Trinidad is the war name of Juvenal Ovidio Ricardo Palmera Pineda. His statement at being sentenced is available at Red Diary (I resist, therefore I exist) [access:< <http://reddiarypk.wordpress.com/2008/01/31/ricardo-palmeras-statement/> >]; ref. “North American Political Prisoners: The War on the Poor,” May 9, 2008, nightslantern.ca [access: < <http://nightslantern.ca/prison/fprisoners.htm> >] and subsequent [access: < <http://nightslantern.ca/prison/2prisoners.htm#wp> >].

<sup>x</sup> “FARC appeals for rebel leader’s release from US prison,” Carlos Batista (AFP), Jan. 18, 2014, News Daily.

<sup>xi</sup> For example, Geneva Conventions, “Convention (III) relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of War. Geneva, 12 August 1949” ICRC, Article 13 demands the captured be “humanly treated.” Article 22 forbids internment in penitentiaries. Article 38 specifically requires intellectual pursuits be allowed. The Convention’s protection cannot be waived by the prisoner and applies to acts prior to capture.

<sup>xii</sup> “Prison Inc: the Secret Industry,” Jan. 25, 2014, infowars.com.

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