

Solitary Watch

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://solitarywatch.org/2011/10/30/voices-from-solitary-there-must-never-be-a-time-when-we-fail-to-protest/>

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by [Sal Rodriguez](#) | October 30, 2011

The following is a series of excerpts from letters written by a prisoner who has been in solitary confinement in the Security Housing Unit (SHU) at Pelican Bay State Prison for nearly two decades. He participated in the July hunger strike for changes to conditions in and policies governing California's SHUs, and resumed during the second phase of the strike in September. The letters, dated before, during, and after the September 26th-October 13th hunger strike, provide a glimpse into the motivations and experiences of the hunger strikers.

Sept. 25, 2011

We choose our reactions and attitudes to situations that irritate us just as we choose what to wear each day. I have learned that we have the power within to choose the outcome of our feelings, embracing a bad, painful feeling or running from it. Also it helps to experience what we feel from the inside out. When everything on the outside looks gloomy, we open our heart/mind where the love and peace live, and healing. There inside are the answers that we seek, to bring calm and conscious flow freely as our inner compass.

Doubts ruled my life for a long time, and the thought of opening myself up to face reality scared me. The feeling of worthlessness loomed deep, at a loss where to start my transformation. Not only that, I didn't want to face my own demons and shadows, which caused fear and incapacity, kept me inactive inside, spurning growth. To be able to detach from this has brought a gush of fresh air into my life and new commitment to change now, grow up. I made tons of mistakes and bad decisions over the course of my life that I am not proud of. Everyone has stuff in their lives to sort out, which is a challenge of course when conditioning is deeply rooted. No change is possible without awareness, healing, and commitment. Living in denial, one is empty and disconnected from life, as was the case with me for too long. If we know how to love ourselves, truly accepting our whole being, there is peace, strength, active inner growth and excitement naturally, and overall happiness.

Heard on Cali NPR news that CDC PBSP said another strike will start 9/26 in SHU. That inmates are trying to manipulate the system via the hunger strike protest to get what the CDCR won't give them. And that disciplinary actions will be taken against inmates partaking in the hunger strike. The penalty would be 90 days loss of privileges (TV/canteen), also photo (1) a year. This threat is to be expected issued by PBSP staff, and it will deter inmates from getting involved in the strike tomorrow. I don't think support in here, numbers of inmates participating, will be as huge as the count in July. Or it'll be a high count at the start then a big number drop after a few days. But even with a small number of committed inmates striking, with support from outside a lot can still be accomplished. It doesn't seem like many inmates are enthused about this upcoming strike, hardly any talk of it. There are a lot of inmates in SHU satisfied with what we won from July hunger strike, and feel no need to strike so soon, wait for 4-6 months to see if CDCR comes through or not. A lot of inmates will also use excuses to not partake in this strike. It doesn't make them bad if they decide not to be a part of this. We are all suffering in the SHU and need to all stand together, not separate, protesting peacefully to end prison abuse and unfair CDC policies.

What I went on hunger strike last time for was for human justice, to be treated right as human beings, fairness, compassion, positive reform, dignity, just to bring awareness about what's going on here in the SHU, the torture and suffering. I gained so much clarity spiritually and emotionally, cleansing from the strike, very important to my growth and human compassion happy to say.

There may be times when we are powerless to prevent injustice, but there must never be a time when we fail to protest. It's about being treated as humans and for CDCR to accept responsibility and follow the law as responsible employees of the state.

Oct. 8 2011

Woke up late with a massive headache. The MTA came by yesterday for second weigh in, and to take our blood pressure. My weight now 198 lbs.; I lost five pounds since I was weighed on Tuesday. I never really gained back all my weight after the July hunger strike (hs). I saw doc yesterday, it seemed that her mind was somewhere else. After dinner was served, the MTA came around, stopped by my cell to drop off powdered lemon Gatorade. I was having chest pains and shortness of breath. They brought a wheelchair in to cart me to the medical clinic to run tests. An EKG was done, also my blood sugar level checked, it's at 56 really low from what the health care provider said. He said 80-120 is healthy number.

When I feel my body cannot take it no more I will end my strike not to permanently damage any internal organs if it's not too late. I must

do my part in this contributing to protest bringing change, still seven cells in my pod are going strong striking; one cell hold out, not partaking in this doesn't believe any good will come out of this strike. My pod has the most inmates striking in the unit. Few days ago over 26 cells came off the strike same day, and just 12-13 cells now striking still in the whole unit. The first hs, makeshift medical stalls were set up in the corridor, but not this strike nor were any medical staff from outside brought in to help out in case.

This strike doesn't seem as strong and united as in July. What I mean by that is it seems a lot of prisoners' hearts not in this strike, no faith. Many believe that the first strike was the time to push, go all the way till the main demands were met; that it ended too soon and big error to take CDCR word knowing their bad track record not coming through on a lot that they say.

The program slammed earlier today guards say 115s write-ups are being passed out but nobody came through this pod yet issuing us a 155 write-up. We been hearing well get them, but who really knows, it may be a ploy to force inmates to end their strike. If disciplinary action is taken it's just 90 days loss of privileges (TV or canteen), it's up to the senior hearing officer one of the two to take. I'm feeling more tired as the strike continues, but mentally I feel all right and my spirits solid last I checked. I been suited up thermals lately to ward off the cold. I get the chills now in the daytime that I have to bundle up fast, thermals and jumpsuit.

It seems the ladies at the office (CPF and LSPWC) don't get enough rest and they work long hours into the night. Remind them not risk their health overworking themselves where they become sick.

I need to fatten up lost so much weight that hopefully I can gain a lot back (by end of the year). This hs is more important (than food), the fight against CDCR torture and neglect. I started this hs on 9/26 with no regret and heart fully committed. I've heard now lots of inmates voicing doubt about this hs seeing that CDCR aren't negotiating. Every inmate knew going into this strike second time, that it may get rough, things may turn for the better or worse but that a sacrifice would have to be made in unity, protesting till one can no longer go; the body is shutting down. The hs in July, I learned to separate different aspects of myself and deal with them individually, not to let the situation control me, old triggers. This isn't easy especially in prison, but the biggest difference dealing with matters today than in the past is the fact that now I am wide awake watching my reactions, able to stop, re-evaluating the situation instead of rushing forward.

I was thinking earlier in the day how people in prison and outside postpone living until things in their lives shape up. I too was trapped in this maze going nowhere before I picked up the nine years in 1997, I had focused more on the day I get out rather than trying to create a plan for myself when I am released. What was I thinking?! There's a higher purpose in life for all humans. We just have to find our place in the world being a positive force, and promote change and compassion naturally. How easy it is to deal with adversity and suffering when we are open and generous with ourselves and others.

Oct. 10, 2011

We got 115s today, was expected. My body feels worn out but mentally I am fine. Nine of us left the hunger strike in this unit. I don't know when I'll end my hunger strike, taking it day by day. I've found peace in my life now, and so much closure. Saw doc today, weight and glucose numbers falling, but not to worry.

The hunger strike showed CDCR our unbreakable spirit to fight for our human rights and willing to starve to death to stop PBSP torture and abuse. The CDCR can no longer ignore our complaints and cries. They know the truth is out there and watchful eyes of the community is on CDCR now. The strike was but a prelude for true justice, as the pelican is finally airborne and can't be stopped.

Oct. 18 2011

It's been hectic on my end during this hs, also being moved having our property packed then unpacked (some things stolen by guards) getting situated again is draining, especially when your energy is low. Haven't eaten since 9/25. I just finished today unpacking, organizing a little at a time. I am far off full strength but I feel really good mentally, physically, and spiritually. I just feel weak my joints aching. I'm eating slowly building my appetite again. Last I weighed myself I was at 193 lbs. The last week of hs, medical staff passed out daily packets of Gatorade/vitamins morning and evening. This stopped after the hs ended, and the medical staff stopped walking through the units checking up on us. I started eating on 10/14.

Memo was passed out to us on 10/13 stating that the hs is over. The paper had four signatures on it: Carol, Marilyn, Ron, and Laura Magnani. Last name was S. Kernan on the memo. A lot of us didn't want to believe the memo, seeing no names of the reps. Many of us didn't want to stop striking until we received concrete confirmation from one of the reps that hs is over. We thought the memo CDCR issued is a hoax. For weeks we heard Carol and Marilyn are under investigation by CDCR not allowed to visit any inmates. Everyone striking also supporters outside knew the truth why CDCR banned Carol and Marilyn from visiting a tactic to shut down communication. Then suddenly, a memo was issued to all inmates striking with Carol and Marilyn names signature in which seemed odd to us at first. You can imagine how skeptical a lot of us in this unit were to acknowledge the memo at first. A few inmates, 4-5, didn't end their hs in this unit till two days later after we got the memo. They didn't believe the memo S. Kernan put out. I said to myself, I don't think CDCR would forge the lawyers name on the memo, place the CDC in a position to be sued by the lawyers. That act would really reflect bad on this prison. So I ended my hs the next day after I received the memo.

Inmates who were still striking in D side long corridor blocks, were all put all in this block, easier for staff to monitor us and closer to medical. PBSP high up, wanted to also separate inmates striking in the unit from inmates no longer partaking. Another reason why staff moved us strikers the hardcore bunch to this unit. The pod I came from, six cells were moved out to this block, us six weren't even thinking about ending our hs till CDCR agreed to meet our demands 1-2, show fairness at least.

How do I feel now today health overall great just exhausted slow too and hungry.

Sal Rodriguez was Solitary Watch's first and most prolific intern. Based in Los Angeles, he served as an editorial writer and columnist for the Orange County Register and the Press-Enterprise, and is now the opinion editor for the Southern California News Group.

Accurate information and authentic storytelling can serve as powerful antidotes to ignorance and injustice. We have helped generate public awareness, mainstream media attention, and informed policymaking on what was once an invisible domestic human rights crisis.

Only with your support can we continue this groundbreaking work, shining light into the darkest corners of the U.S. criminal punishment system.

by [Voices from Solitary](#)

September 30, 2022

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September 19, 2022

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September 6, 2022

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Laureen,

The ombudsmen don't care one iota about the prisoners, ESPECIALLY about this ongoing battle of ending solitary confinement. I sought them out during the initial PBSP hunger strike and they were adamantly arguing that it is not their job to be concerned. Their paycheck comes from the same place the sadistic COs get theirs. It's not hard to figure out those staffed by CDCR are only there to get paid and have no other real concern except maybe personal safety.

There are many of us inside and outside that are praying for you all, that you get what you want. It is injustice for what you all have gone through these years that you have been in SHU. Just remember that Jesus Christ loves each one of you so much.

Hi, Sis Denise

By your username, do you happen to be a Catholic nun?

Sounds like you might be; just curious.

I wish Sal & all the other inmates there @ the SHU get their demands met. Sure seems that there should be some ombudsman there to see to the inmates' concerns, but that's prison for you. I also think that state legislatures should enact laws that limit the time that inmates spend in SHU. I concur w/ the assertion that long-term solitary confinement is torture. I just don't know of anything that I as an individual can do about it. Maybe I'll start writing to some of the inmates @ PBSHU..

Just so you know, there are many outside the US also who protest the injustice of mass incarceration and the torture of solitary confinement, whatever it is called.

You are very kind to still show any care for the officers after so many years in solitary that alone shows so much my best wishes to you all but your fight is not over. PBSP can not abandon the others still fighting for their rights. We all know of the 300 who stood till the end but in your fight you let 150 stand alone. Ones your SHU won't share part of the others they stood by you your turn to do the same for them. The 150 who still go on are like the Spartans standing till the end willing to return with their shields or upon them that I fear is what it will take to take down solitary in the end. May there be light in the darkness of justice.

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