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Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://solitarywatch.org/2013/08/12/day-36-of-california-hunger-strike-hundreds-still-protesting-isolation-policies/>

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by [Sal Rodriguez](#) | August 12, 2013

Today is day 36 of a statewide hunger strike that began on July 8th with the participation of 30,000 individuals in prisons across California. As of yesterday, 270 people in six institutions were on hunger strike; 152 of them continuously since July 8 according to the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR).

Chief among the strikers demands is an end to long-term solitary confinement and reform of the gang validation process that has placed 3,000 prisoners in long-term segregation units called the Security Housing Units (SHU). The gang validation process, recently [revised](#), has been criticized for its use of seemingly arbitrary pieces of evidence of gang activity in order to justify the segregation of prisoners identified as gang members or gang associates.

The latter category of associate constitutes the largest segment of those in the SHU, and consists of individuals identified as having occasional contact with members or other associates of prison gangs. The validation process, challenged in California Assembly hearings in 2011 and 2012 as providing insufficient due process, has been [known](#) to use black nationalist newspapers, books such as *The Prince* by Machiavelli, and drawings (of dragons, Aztec imagery, or birds) as evidence of gang activity.

CDCR has resumed case-by-case reviews it began in October 2012 in facilities no longer holding hunger strike participants of all SHU prisoners currently segregated following gang validation. The purposes of the reviews are to determine whether or not those reviewed should be kept in the SHU or released to the general population. Of the 415 who have already been reviewed, 230 have been immediately endorsed for or released to the general population. In other words, CDCR has mostly been inaccurate at identifying gang members and associates who pose security threats for years.

Participants are known to be hunger striking at Calipatria State Prison, Pelican Bay State Prison, and Corcoran State Prison, though CDCR will not disclose for safety and security reasons which facilities are participating. As CDCR [told](#) Solitary Watch in the early weeks of the hunger strike, participants have been stripped of their property, items purchased through the prison canteen removed, and sandbags or other objects placed at the doors of strike participants. Strike leaders were removed from their cells and placed either in Administrative Segregation Units (ASU) or different sections of the SHU. Leaders at Pelican Bay have been in ASUs; at Corcoran, they've been placed in a SHU section reportedly occupied by gang dropouts (debriefers). One hunger striker, Billy Sell, committed suicide in the SHU at Corcoran the day after he ended his two-week participation.

One Corcoran hunger strike participant, Jabari Scott, in a [letter](#) published by the *San Francisco Bay View*, described the removal of those identified as leaders:

the riot team was out front strategizing and preparing for a full-scale war.

Again it was clear that the strategy here was purely to provoke our beloved brothers into taking a violent stance to turn our peaceful protest into a violent one so that they could run to the media with these latest events to taint the strength and momentum of our peaceful protest.

As soon as all the guys on the list were informed of their immediate departure, the riot team began to put their scare tactics into motion. Sandbags were dragged in and placed in front of the door of each person that was on the list to prevent guys from doing any last minute communicating or returning any items they may have had of someone.

Next they bring in a giant plexiglas barricade used for cell extractions and placed it in the middle of the dayroom so it would be clearly seen. Then about 25 COs came filing in in full riot gear with a cameraman in tow to record the whole event.

Each cell they approached, all the guys were packed and ready to peacefully move. In total about seven cells and 10 men all peacefully moved!

You could see the dismay on the majority of the COs faces, which proves their intent was violence and it was clear that they were upset that every man remained peaceful and left peacefully even though it was greatly inconveniencing to everyone. We will survive and keep

the peaceful protest moving forward towards victory.

A Pelican Bay hunger striker, who has apparently ended his participation after three weeks, wrote in a letter to Texas activist Twitch:

I went 21 days! & Ill tell you what brother, it was extremely difficult! I lost nearly 22 pounds, I was dehydrated. My heart was pounding out of my chest; it was hard to even drink water. My mouth had sores, my legs were badly chapped, & my stomach could barely hold it down. I had to drink real slow, only a little at a time. Your head starts to hurt, almost like you have a head (fus) (fuzz? illegible) is how it starts to feel after the 1st week.

Consistent with significant physiological harm, CDCR has [confirmed](#) that 31 hunger strikers had lost more than 10 percent of their body weight, and 57 had refused to be weighed. There were reportedly no hospitalizations over the weekend as of Sunday afternoon.

It is unclear whether or not prisoners at San Quentin are still on hunger strike; over the course of the strike CDCR confirmed that participants there had even refused water at least one day during the strike. In a recent letter from a hunger striker at San Quentin:

In this struggle we must remain realistic and rational recognizing that most of the meaningful changes we are striving for may not occur in this lifetime of ours. But the most important thing to remember is that the progress we make now will go toward breaking ground for those future improvements. Therefore, every ripple we create all even will eventually become greater, gathering more momentum to the point it can no longer be contained. Ultimately, abolishing the cruel and torturous practice of solitary confinement and inhumane lethal injection.

Of course, CDCR's stance, as explained by CDCR chief [Jeffrey Beard](#) is that this is all just a gang power play. Ditto what *Sacramento Bee* columnist Dan Morain and the *Bees* [Editorial Board](#) want the public to believe, having written that [the real story](#) of the hunger strike is that it is really the brainchild of a sociopath (Todd Ashker) that the pampered elite of Hollywood have rallied behind.

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 [Juan Moreno Haines](#)

October 25, 2022

by [Solitary Watch Guest Author](#)

October 13, 2022

by [Vaidya Gullapalli](#)

September 29, 2022

Solitary Watch encourages comments and welcomes a range of ideas, opinions, debates, and respectful disagreement. We do not allow name-calling, bullying, cursing, or personal attacks of any kind. Any embedded links should be to information relevant to the conversation. Comments that violate these guidelines will be removed, and repeat offenders will be blocked. Thank you for your cooperation.

I think it's just sad that the CDCR as well as the secretary Jeffrey Beard are coming out with all this BS to justify their ignorance regarding the severity of the lives of those fighting to have their voices heard in the most peaceful way. My fiancé is one of the men who participated in this hunger strike he went as far as day 33. Now he is in the hospital throwing up blood & has been since the 6th of August. It really hurts me to know my love is so near death & according to the letter I received from him he could see the seriousness of his condition in the eyes of the physician who is attending him. My love had been taking meds for his hypertension for years prior to this strike 2 weeks into the strike he ran out of meds & when he requested a refill he was refused his meds as well as any medical attention due to his participation in the peaceful hunger strike. He has also mentioned how the COs have been messing with them which I know personally how they are & can be. It amazes me that this type of action is still being done & how many men are literally being tortured for trying to stand for their rights & the more the participants of the strike continue to participate in this strike in a very peaceful manner the more it makes the COs more mad, aggressive, & makes them mess with them more to try to turn these men into cruel heartless animals such as themselves. Good thing is I'm glad God made my fiancé good & better than any of them that no matter what they do to him he is still keeping his calm even though he knows he may die before a change is made. Please allow this comment to be read because all my fiancé did to be thrown into the SHU was submit a very strong appeal for his freedom & when the COs read it they chose to make his life a living hell by trying to provoke him from being a model prisoner that hadn't had a write up for any violent acts in 11 years by harassing him, throwing him into Pelican Bay's SHU to try to scare him into snitching on someone for his freedom. Well no matter what they do to my fiancé he would never sign his life over to the devil. So today he lies in a hospital bed fighting for his life literally hoping that he will continue to live to 1 day win his appeal to be able to come home us where God knows he belongs. He didn't deserve any of what he's received but only a better life.

Great story, thank you for showing that things can be done peacefully, but at a cost to human beings

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