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Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

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Our Weekly Roundup of News and Views on Solitary Confinement

by [Valerie Kiebala](#) | March 25, 2018

In These Times [reported](#) on the Operation PUSH labor strikes across Florida prisons that began on January 15 of this year, organizing against what they say is the brutality of Florida Department of Corrections (FDOC) officers, poor living conditions, and unfair labor practices. Many of the participants in the work stoppage, according to the Incarcerated Workers Organizing Committee (IWOC), faced intimidation and solitary confinement for their involvement in the nonviolent protest. While the FDOC maintains that no work stoppages have taken place, Karen Smith of the IWOC explained, They were able to claim no strike activity. But reviewing the records of disciplinary confinement or relocation, along with the increased staff presence and communication management, [reveals] that Operation PUSH has had, and continues to have, an economic impact.

The Intercept published an [article](#) regarding the use of solitary confinement at Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) facilities run by the private prison contractor CoreCivic. While CoreCivic claims that their use of isolation does not constitute solitary confinement, *The Intercept* obtained photos of the cell of Jean Jimenez-Joseph, a man who hanged himself in May while being held in isolation at a CoreCivic facility in Georgia. After seeing the photos, former United Nations Special Rapporteur on Torture Juan Mendez said, Whatever they call it, this cell can only be used for solitary confinement. It is clearly unsuitable for more than a few hours. Psychiatrist Terry Kupers added that the soundproof doors are very isolating, and one small step from a solid metal door. Definitely that's consistent with, or imposes, solitary confinement.

The *National Post* published an opinion [piece](#) expressing the danger and injustice of solitary confinement in Canada, especially in the context of the 2010 suicide of 24-year-old indigenous man Edward Snowshoe, who had been held in solitary confinement for 162 days and had already attempted suicide four times. Catherine Latimer of the prison reform organization the John Howard Society explained the urgency of ending the use of solitary confinement: If we found out that animals in a Humane Society shelter were being caged in circumstances where they were losing their sanity, injuring themselves, killing themselves, society would respond in a very heartfelt way. I can't imagine why the response is any less with humans involved. The article calls for Canada to comply with UN protocols by ending its use of prolonged solitary confinement.

The Reflector [reported](#) that the parents of Mychael Lynch have filed a federal lawsuit, claiming that officers at the Clark County Jail in Washington state withheld necessary medical treatment and employed unlawful excessive force that caused their son's death in 2015. Lynch's death from a fatal brain injury due to lack of oxygen was ruled a homicide. The lawsuit claims that Lynch called for assistance when he feared for his life, after showing signs of mental distress and anxiety. When a deputy threatened to kill Lynch if he continued to use the assistance button, Lynch hit the button and officers arrived to move him into solitary confinement. According to the lawsuit, during a subsequent struggle, as many as 10 officers piled on top of Lynch and remained there even though he did not resist, stopped breathing, and lost consciousness. He died three days later, while on life support.

A group of Texas-based advocacy organizations has released a [new report](#) documenting human rights abuses occurring at the West Texas Detention Facility, an Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) facility run by the private prison company LaSalle Corrections. [According](#) to *The Intercept*, the report describes the experiences of 30 Somali immigrants, including one man who claimed that the warden of the facility hit him in the face four times in the nurses office. When the nurse denied witnessing the incident, the man claims he was then placed in solitary confinement, where [he] was forced to lie face down on the floor with [his] hands handcuffed behind [his] back while [he] was kicked repeatedly in the ribs by the warden. The man said he would sue the warden, who responded, We've got enough money. The report notes that the West Texas Detention Facility has demonstrated a pattern of throwing individuals in solitary confinement for arbitrary or vindictive reasons.

Rewire News [reported](#) that Laura Monterrosa, a Salvadoran woman who claimed to have been sexually assaulted by a guard while being held at the Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) T. Don Hutto facility in Texas, has been released from detention this week. Though Monterrosa, and subsequently several other women, came forward with allegations of sexual assault by Hutto guards, ICE conducted an investigation that found the allegations unsubstantiated, and Monterrosa was placed in solitary confinement, forced to regularly encounter her abuser, and threatened with indefinite solitary if she did not recant her accusations. An organizer involved in the case said, Our hearts are full knowing that Laura does not need to spend any more time at Hutto, but we will not stop fighting until every

injustice at Hutto is addressed and the facility is closed once and for all. Currently, 500 women remain detained at Hutto.

Valerie Kiebal was a contributing writer and editorial and project manager for Solitary Watch, and is now the media director of Straight Ahead, which is building a decarceration movement throughout Pennsylvania. Her work has also appeared in The Root, Truthout, the Chicago Reporter, and Shadowproof.

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 [Mirilla Zhu](#)

October 26, 2022

by [Caitlin Konya](#)

October 19, 2022

by [Mirilla Zhu](#)

October 12, 2022

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