

Why we reject the plan to fix the schools by cutting prison funding.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO PIT STUDENTS AGAINST PRISONERS? Obviously at the first level it's a maneuver of public relations. The government is taking the words of the student movement into its mouth, but without proposing any real solution for the crisis of schools or prisons: only a desperate attempt to maneuver itself around the political crises on its horizon.

The university and the prison are the two remaining institutions in this society in which masses of individuals are gathered together for years at a time. They exist as reverse mirror images of each other; the schools, for the privileged, to produce particular kinds of skilled labor; the prisons, for another kind of workforce, the lumpen or surplus population who are not necessary to the economy. They become subjects of value production through being incarcerated, or through participation in underground and gangster economies; they go into the military; they live in the shantytowns popping up across the state. They are a reserve pool. The prison is symbiotic with the ghetto; college, with the suburb; in this sense they are structures of class stratification which mark out their denizens for very different roles in life.

In the last major revolutionary upsurge (the 1960s and 70s), prisoners and students played major roles, especially in California. The riots in Berkeley; George Jackson and the San Quentin six. The counter-revolution was not purely repressive, but actively constructed with millions of tons of concrete in the new, more modern schools and prisons. The kinds of crowds that gathered by the thousands in Sproul Plaza during the Free Speech Movement were preventively dispersed by the new campuses designed to have no central gathering point. Similarly, in the prisons, new regimes of separation and isolation were installed. Prisoners across the board were

cut off further from contact with the outside world and with other sections of the prison, contained in smaller, more manageable, modular sections. The communication that had been necessary for the radicalization of prisoners like George Jackson and his Black Guerrilla Family, or the inmates who seized control of Attica, was made impossible; it became difficult to even get books into prisons. The 1980s saw the appearance of the "super-maximum" control units, and while prison segregation had been banned, authorities found it advantageous to stimulate racial hostilities among their captives. Meanwhile, the rise of both community colleges and community corrections served to de-center both institutions in space.

Today, 1 in 200 Californians are in prison (most of them on nonviolent drug offenses), and most prisons are operating at 200% of designed capacity. In August, a panel of three federal judges ordered the state of California to release 43,000 inmates due to the low level of medical care and other conditions creating an "immediate [risk of] death and harm." The governor, of course, refused. And now he gives us this absurd proposal to set a max percentage for prisons at 7% of the budget, and universities at 11%—reversing their current standing. This is only a crude propaganda move; all this has of course been pointed out before—that there is only so much in the budget, that thanks to Prop 13 and the two-thirds majority required for raising taxes, the treasury is simply becoming drained. Some of the more prescient elements of the student movement have already demanded the liberation of the state's captives. Of course, the policy proposals on the table basically come down to the Republicans, who oppose early parole, and Democrats who oppose cuts to prison health care.

The only possible solution to salvage either of these institutions for capital is to privatize them. It is here that capitalism as the unbridled negation of human existence shows its face; these two

sites which are already situated to mold individuals to their social roles will be put under the rule of the most cutthroat calculus—quality will never outstrip quantity within the capitalist mode of existence. Students are merely collateral for construction loans, and a gamble on productive jobs in the future; prisoners are those without a legitimate place in the process, except as a reserve labor force (and object of prison corporations; let's not forget prison labor as well, the latest form of slavery). And in order to create new forms of value, there must be a simultaneous devaluation of a particular sector of society. The university is thus being redesigned as a glorified vocational school, producer of complex labor powers for a privileged few, and an outsourced research and development division for state and corporate agencies to which it is ultimately the appendage. Its future can only be ever-more null and quantitative existence for its ever-more restricted pool of students: there must necessarily be those who are excluded access from the university, in order for the degrees it produces to be worth anything.

The opposite pole of social reproduction is found in the prison system, where individuals are actively being made useless. The prison is no longer meant to be a place to rehabilitate individuals, but a dead end in which the individual's nullity in everyday life comes to its logical conclusion. As jobs become scarce, foreclosed homes are left unoccupied, and the prisons become the only place in which the growing number of people without a tenable capacity to produce value can be safely placed. It is this devaluation of living labor—*“the crisis of a period in which capitalism no longer needs us as workers”*—which underlies the crises of the prison, the university, and so much more. Socially condemned individuals are to simply be warehoused and contained at all costs, healthcare be damned. Imprisonment is exclusion taking total form, one which marks even those who depart from its walls, still to be denied inclusion in the legitimate economy through the loss of employment, education and housing. (Much like immigrants who are finding themselves increasingly imprisoned and deported.) The prison as a form of mass containment and social control originated as the debtors' prison; we still speak of prisoners “paying their debt

to society.” Now students and workers are facing more debt than ever before: our whole society is a debtors' prison. Meanwhile, the extension of parole regimes, house arrest, and generalized surveillance may be another means not just of reducing the cost of prisons, but bringing them into ever closer convergence with the rest of daily life (or rather, vice versa).

The unity we are calling for in the struggle against the privatization of both schools and prisons, and toward their abolition along with all other structures of capitalist society, is not based on some spurious identification between the student and the prisoner. We realize they occupy very different, again, almost opposite places in the social sphere. What we have in common is our becoming increasingly useless to capitalist production; the increasing uselessness of any given person, who might be given a wheel to spin if they show sufficient obedience, and thrown in a cell if not. In either case, to spend our days in a bloodless, alienated, increasingly solitary and disconnected form of life. It is the growing mass of useless people who, during capitalism's mounting crises—so it's said—become the *proletariat*, the class-for-itself that is forced, in order to defend its interests, to destroy the capitalist economic mode. In other words, when the opposite poles meet is when the whole thing collapses: when we confront these kinds of divide-and-conquer tactics, not just through analysis, but by articulating through action where our loyalties lie—not with the system that reduces everyone to functions and lists of numbers, but with all whose lives are reduced and controlled by it. It is through the decomposition of our assigned roles, and the structures that enforce them on us, that we become worthy of and dangerous in such a struggle. By means of strike, blockade, looting, occupation, and riot, we will make this crisis the last.

***FOR COLLECTIVE ACTION
AGAINST ALL CAPITALIST
SOCIAL INSTITUTIONS!**