



Struggle-La-Lucha.org

St. Louis prisoners rebel against COVID spread, hunger: ‘This is genocide’

written by EXPO-St. Louis
February 9, 2021



Inmates at St. Louis City Justice Center protest racist treatment, Feb. 6.

Sometime in the early morning of Feb. 6, the inmates at the St. Louis City Justice Center (CJC) staged an act of civil disobedience because of the inhumane treatment by CJC management concerning COVID-19 along with other issues.

EXPO (EX-Incarcerated People Organizing) works to end mass incarceration, eliminate all forms of structural discrimination against formerly incarcerated people and restore them to full citizenship. EXPO-St. Louis was made aware that more than 50 inmates participated in a peaceful protest that took place on Dec. 29. Nothing was done to address those issues and this morning's uprising was the natural evolution of the actions of living and feeling human beings.

Here now is a communication received from inside the Justice Center itself:

On the morning of Tuesday, December 29, 2020, around 10 a.m. CT, myself (Cortez Easterwood-Bey IMN #6694) and more than 50 other inmates on at least two floors within Missouri's St. Louis Justice Center stood together in solidarity outside of our cells as a form of peaceful protest to exercise our First Amendment right to free speech in a peaceful attempt to voice our grievances to be heard by CJC management that have gone unanswered after months (anywhere from 2-6 months or more) of following the established procedures for filing complaints and grievances.

We recently learned from sympathetic guards/correctional officers (hereafter referred to as COs) that these complaint and grievance forms rarely go past the CO whom the form was given to, let alone to their supervisor nor an outside entity or CJC official. Our peaceful protest was unequally matched with resistance by CJC staff akin to the pre-Civil Rights Movement — we were subjected to tear gas, hosed down with strong water, and placed face down in inches of said but now contaminated water in order to be handcuffed, transferred to the known dilapidated Medium Security Institution (MSI) nicknamed the "Workhouse," and placed "in the hole" without proper heat, dry clothing and new face masks.

All this because we were trying to tell jail staff and management that we don't want to DIE, we are hungry, we want proper ventilation, we are tired of being cold without being given winter clothing, we want proper PPE for COVID-19, we are tired of being price gouged in the commissary and vending machines, we want the mandated six "recs" per day, and we want visits from family and friends since there is a glass barrier between them and the inmates.

How long do we inmates have to go without before one stops adhering to socially acceptable civil norms when they are blatantly and continuously being denied such — not only the ability to live but also other basic [prison] rights such as the

ability to breathe uncontaminated air?

Because of this incident, jail staff have threatened to destroy and discard our personal belongings, religious and otherwise, as punishment. Their purported excuse for this action is because the tear gas they used has contaminated said belongings. So, we will no longer have our legal documents nor anything we or our family or friends purchased for us — food, clothing, toiletries, religious documents/books/items, photos, etc. This is our punishment for asking not to be infected with COVID and to have proper and adequate food, PPE, etc.?

To my knowledge, there are at least 12 lawsuits filed by other inmates due to the outcome and actions of jail staff at CJC for this initially “peaceful protest” that has been quelled by correctional officials so the media and public are kept unaware.

On New Year’s Eve, there were already 51 of us in the hole in one “pod,” which was supposed to hold a maximum of 60 people pre-pandemic, that were healthy and uninfected with COVID. However, prison staff decided to add 11 more inmates, some of whom were visibly infected with COVID!

This is genocide.



Family members and supporters gathered outside in solidarity. Photo: EXPO-Stl

Inmates deliberately infected

Prior to this peaceful protest that is now being reported as a “riot”, there were 24 inmates in my pod KNOWN TO BE INFECTED with COVID by jail staff, but instead of properly quarantining them, they kept them in the pod and with their cell mates in a 6-foot by 9-foot cell. Twenty-four infected inmates soon turned into almost 50 infected inmates in less than 48 hours!!! That’s over 90% of the inmates housed in ONE pod of 60 persons!!!

Further, COs are telling us that not only are they NOT going to test us but such

testing is voluntary even if the inmate is visibly exhibiting the classic symptoms of a COVID infection. When those of us who are healthy request to be tested for COVID, we are denied and persons from the detention center regardless of their COVID status are continuously mixed in with the uninfected population within the actual jail/CJC, which houses over 800 inmates and more than 60% of those are currently visibly and audibly infected with COVID and are probably not getting proper/adequate medical attention.

Many of us have not yet gone to trial. There is at least one inmate who has been locked up at CJC for FIVE YEARS without going to trial. So how is it that the St. Louis City Justice Center staff are allowed to be our judge, jury and now executioner during this deadly pandemic???

We don't want to DIE from SARS COVID-19, especially not at the hands of correctional staff. We are tired of being purposely exposed to other inmates and detainees who visibly have COVID. Jail staff won't test inmates but claim that current pod members have been exposed to COVID even though we have not been tested during the entire arrest and detention process. Yet COs are constantly placing untested people, healthy or infected, in a jail cell, pod or holding area with healthy people.

Even though we are inmates and regardless of whether we have been found guilty of a crime we may or may not have committed, our request is not unreasonable. This IS genocide. We are being treated like the Jews during Hitler's regime. Instead of Germany we are in America. And the jail is being run much like the concentration camps. But because we are Black and Brown and don't fit the historical standard of American beauty, we are treated as less than. We are being treated worse than George Floyd. Instead of one officer with his knee on one Black man's neck for almost 8 minutes, we have several officers and agents of Missouri, and more specifically the CJC, who are knowingly not following the COVID guidelines and

protocols set forth by the CDC and U.S. Department of Justice.

Prisoners left hungry and cold

We are HUNGRY. We are pleading for not only proper nutrition but portion sizes that are befitting of an adult male. The lack of proper and adequate sustenance is known to weaken the immune system, thus making any person more susceptible to any disease but especially the highly contagious COVID virus. We get the same chunk of bread-like cake for every meal (breakfast, lunch and dinner). I have been in CJC for almost two months and have yet to be given any fruit, have only once been given a “salad” that consisted of three tightly stuck together pieces of lettuce and one sliver of a shredded carrot. Our vegetables, if we are given them, consist of canned corn or green beans.

The commissary and vending machines (in the facility or online for purchase by our family and friends to send to us, which is received bi-weekly) consists mostly of highly processed and junk/snack foods that are grossly overpriced compared to the Missouri prisons and normal retail outlets accessible to most American citizens.

We are tired of being COLD when the temperatures outside are also cold. The COs verbally refuse to turn the heat up, even in the detention/holding facility, citing they are trying to keep all from getting COVID. We have not been given proper clothing to deal with such temperatures within the actual facility. Most of the world is struggling financially so there are very few of us who are recently detained during this pandemic whose family can even afford to purchase a thermal top or bottom or thicker socks via the online commissary. The inmates are not working, and many of us newly detained have not worked during this pandemic, but even if we had we either don't have access to those funds and/or have depleted them in our attempts to purchase food from the commissary and vending machines after we are given our “trays” (breakfast, lunch or dinner) that barely have portions or nutrients acceptable for a 10-year-old child let alone a grown man.

We need our RECREATION BREAKS to stay mentally and physically healthy. Per correctional guidelines, inmates are to be given six (6) recreation hours per day. Since I have been detained at CJC, we get less than 3 and it's mostly at the discretion of the guards with seemingly no set time periods or systematic adherence to the standard CDC guidelines. For example, one or more pods are let out of their cells between 7 a.m.-9 a.m. for 45 minutes, then around 3 p.m. for another 45 minutes, and maybe around 11 p.m. for 15-20 minutes.

To myself and others, these actions by CJC-MSI staff seem like an effort to not fully perform the duties which they are getting paid to perform in accordance with standard operating procedures and CDC and DOJ COVID guidelines and protocols. I have found that if I want to exercise (push-ups, etc) in my cell or during rec, I must do so in the morning rec so I have enough time to take a shower. I save my commissary/vending and phone calls for the afternoon rec. All this because we're not given six rec sessions/hours, time is short and we may not get the 3rd/last rec that is much shorter on time and at a time where business calls cannot be made.

We need INFORMATION to research our cases. We have not or only sporadically been given access to the jail's law library during recs. There are also only six tablets provided to one or more pods housing 60+ people. These tablets are supposed to allow us access to the jail's law library and also, for a fee, be able to communicate with our family and friends via text messaging who have a SmartJailMail account. Most of the time, said tablets are inoperable because they weren't charged properly between recs and/or will not hold a charge. Further, the tablets do not allow for video chatting with anyone.

We need to SEE our loved ones. The CJC website says visitation is allowed and special allowances for such may be made to family members or friends who reside out-of-town. However, this is a lie. All inmates have been told that there is no visitation due to COVID despite the fact that in the visitation area at CJC the inmates

are separated from the visitors by a glass partition and wall.

'We need PPE'

We need but are not given proper PPE. Yet COs are walking around in what appear to be hazmat suits. Inmates are only given a standard face mask bi-weekly. Many don't have one because it broke, became dirty, wet, etc. Payphones, vending machines, tablets, etc., are not sanitized after each use and tables, common areas, etc., are not sanitized after each rec. We need more types of PPE (gloves, N95 masks, face shields, etc.) to protect us against our cellmate who is infected with COVID whom the COs purposely place in our cells and refuse to remove healthy inmates or quarantine the infected ones in a separate area or facility.

I personally was NEVER tested for COVID during my entire arrest and lockup experience (October 14, 2020, to present). Not given a temperature check, COVID test kit or nose swab, nor blood check. I have been denied my repeated requests for such. After my arrest, I was placed in the detention/holding facility attached to CJC. I was denied access to a shower and clean clothing for at least 2 weeks. It wasn't until I had an outside person contact my parole officer and a visit was made that I was given a shower, notified of why I was arrested, given a standard jumpsuit and thin (and too small) footwear, and then transferred to the jail-side of CJC.

During my time in holding, officers were constantly moving detainees in and out of the holding area I was in, especially during the day. The area was not cleaned or sanitized. I was not given any PPE during that time. All of this escalated my exposure to this deadly and highly contagious COVID virus.

My detainment in the jail side of CJC has been, for the most part, no different to my initial detainment as indicated above. How is it that not only do I have to protect myself against violence from much younger inmates, I now have to be strategically conscious of protecting my desire to continue to live and breathe unencumbered by

a deadly pandemic-level worldwide virus because correctional staff intentionally place me and others in dangerous and hazardous conditions which further lends us to intentionally get COVID in a short time frame? In some inmates' cases this happens within 24 hours of their cellmate or they themselves being exposed to another inmate or guard who is handling them after dealing with a previous inmate(s) who's visibly and knowingly infected.

We are only given a basic face mask every two weeks. No gloves or other PPE is given nor can we have any mailed to us by our family nor friends. How can we socially distance in a 6-foot by 9-foot cell with no ventilation in an open plan/air facility that is kept cold and we are denied and not provided with additional clothing (jackets, gloves, hats, etc.) or blankets? How can those of us who are not sick stay healthy if we are not given nutrition and portions that sustain us?

Yes, we are inmates, yet many of us have not yet been tried for our supposed crimes. Many of us also have families that we cannot see, barely are able to talk to because their funds are running low or are non-existent for us to call them collect or message them via SmartJailMail.

We feel like POWs in a foreign land in hostile territory. Because of our Blackness/ancestral ties to Africa or Latin America, we are being treated as less than human. We are dying at CJC in unheard of numbers and being intentionally infected at alarming rates.

In my homeland that is the civilized country of America...THIS IS GENOCIDE!

Source: [EXPO](#)

