

EDITORS' INTRODUCTION

A Week in June 2010

*Mike Larsen and Justin Piché **

A significant portion of the previous volume of the *Journal of Prisoners on Prisons* (JPP) addressed the state of incarcerated women in the Canadian context. Many of the contributions discussed the incarceration and preventable death of Ashley Smith. While her case remains a flashpoint for debate about the imprisonment of youth and women in this country, a recent inquest into her death was stymied by resistance to disclose information by the Correctional Service of Canada (CSC) and Ontario coroner's heading the inquiry that appeared to be more interested in procedural gerrymandering than getting at the truth. A new inquest is on the horizon, but it is difficult not to be cynical about what the eventual outcome will be and what impact it will have on the treatment of incarcerated youth and women in Canada, particularly in a context marked by the new majority Conservative federal government's push to intensify the capacity to confine and punish.

One of the contributors to Volume 20(1) is René Acoby, whose article (Acoby, 2011) provides an insider's perspective on the Correctional Service of Canada's management protocol for women prisoners. At the time of writing, Acoby was one of three women subject to a management protocol designation, a bureaucratized regime of graduated administrative segregation used for prisoners deemed high-risk by prison managers. Correctional Investigator Howard Sapers has described the management protocol as a regime of harsh and punitive confinement that jeopardizes mental health (see Botsford Fraser, 2010). Since Volume 20(1) was published, Acoby has become the third woman in Canadian history to be declared a 'dangerous offender'. This designation renders her sentence of indeterminate length, meaning that she will be imprisoned indefinitely, until such time as prison officials decide to release her.

While the previous volume of the *JPP* principally examined the challenging circumstances faced by criminalized and incarcerated women in Canada, this issue perhaps offers a glimpse into the future of imprisonment in this country as additional steps are taken by Prime Minister Stephen

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Harper and his colleagues to send more people to prison, for longer periods of time, with fewer chances of supervised release into the community prior to the expiry of their sentences. The bulk of the articles included here focus on the experiences of American prisoners. While Canada's incarceration rate is still comparatively low in contrast to America's, it should be noted that it did not take long for incarceration rates to explode in the United States. The United States incarcerated nearly 200 per 100,000 residents in the 1970s and imprisoned 762 per 100,000 residents in 2008 (Glaze, 2010). As a number of American jurisdictions have sought to reduce the use of imprisonment for reasons of effectiveness, ethics and finances, resulting in a decline in U.S. prison rates in 2009 to 743 per 100,000 residents (*ibid.*). Our federal government refuses to learn from this experience and has begun a march towards mass incarceration in the name of political gain.

This issue opens with three articles about imprisonment in California that deal, in turn, with life without parole (LWOP), lockdowns, and visitations. In "Making Sense of Life Without the Possibility of Parole", Dortell Williams offers a critique of both the philosophical underpinning and practical consequences of penal policies that effectively impose an 'eternal sentence'. Williams explains the socio-politics underlying the presumption of incorrigibility and contrasts this with the narrative of second chances and redemption that forms an important part of American mythology. In "Cauldron of Solitude", regular *JPP* contributor Eugene Dey examines the phenomenon of lockdowns as a form of compounded isolation. A powerful running thread throughout the article is the recognition that, faced with extraordinary lockdown procedures and arbitrary treatment, the cell can become a place of comparative refuge. An alternative approach, embraced by Dey, is to treat the toxic cauldron of prison as an inspiration for advocacy and writing as resistance. "Visiting Days", by Joel Medina and Beth Caldwell offers a critical analysis of prison visitation that links personal experience with the literature on visits. Their article – one of the most detailed on this topic that has been published in the *JPP* – includes a narrative account of various stages in the visitation process, as seen from both a prisoner's perspective and a visitor's perspective. This is followed by a thorough discussion of the importance of visitations as a means of maintaining family ties and a description of geographical and procedural barriers to visits.

Moving from California to Illinois, Joseph Dole's contribution, "Unilaterally Punitive", also speaks to the practice of life without parole

(LWOP) sentences. Dole explains the normalization and routinization of LWOP – for adults and juveniles – as a defining characteristic of American penalty and a source of increasing distance between US penal policy and global standards. In “Feeding the Beast”, Thomas E. Parton turns a reflexive eye on the relationship between his own attitude and thought processes and his cycle of imprisonment. Writing from a position of hard-earned self-awareness, Parton argues that prisoners need to examine the ways in which their thoughts and actions - particularly the embracing of factional sub-cultures – provide raw material for the expansion of the prison industrial complex.

In “Ronin: A Police Officer’s Fall into the Federal Correctional System”, Andrew Ferguson and Barbara H. Zaitzow write about Fergusson’s transition in status and perspective, from someone ideologically in professionally invested in the criminal justice system to someone inside that system and forced to come to terms with its bureaucracy, rules (particularly the importance of plea agreements) and contradictions. His account reveals a struggle to manage conflicting identities – no longer a law enforcement officer but “still a cop at heart”, and a prisoner but “clearly not a criminal”.

Finally, in “Mom, Prison is Not a Place for Human Beings” Haggai Matar and Anat Matar offer interwoven narratives about political imprisonment in Israel. Haggai writes from the perspective of a prisoner who served two years for his refusal, on grounds of conscientious objection, to join the Israeli army. Anat, Haggai’s mother, writes from the perspective of a long-time advocate for prisoners’ rights, particularly in cases of administrative detention. Both narratives reveal experiences of gradual sensitization to the political role of the carceral within the broader constellation of institutions of control.

In addition to the general section, this issue of the *JPP* includes two *Dialogues* based on events that happened on opposite sides of the Atlantic in June 2010. The first dialogue features a selection of proceedings from the Thirteenth International Conference on Penal Abolition (ICOPA 13) held in Belfast, Northern Ireland from 23-25 June 2010.

Since the first ICOPA held in Toronto in 1983, the conference-movement has brought together activists, academics, journalists, practitioners, prisoners and ex-prisoners, survivors of state and personal harm, and others together to discuss how the abolition of imprisonment, the penal system and carceral controls can be achieved. Alternative ways of addressing the complex conflicts and harms in our communities that the state calls ‘crime’ such as restorative justice and transformative justice have also been discussed at these meetings.

Throughout its history, ICOPA has sought to shape debates on penal system policy internationally, as well as locally where the conference has been held, including Toronto and Montreal (Canada), Amsterdam (Netherlands), Kazimierz (Poland), Bloomington (U.S.), San Jose (Costa Rica), Barcelona (Spain), Auckland (New Zealand / Aotearos), Lagos (Nigeria), Tasmania (Australia) and London (England). The most recent ICOPA took place at a critical period in the history of Ireland, as justice and policing powers are devolved from the UK Parliament to the North Ireland Assembly (see Carlton and Scraton, forthcoming). Given the use of the penal system to suppress dissent, the conference was an important in that it attempted to make links between the incarceration of political prisoners during the ‘troubles’ and individuals who were viewed by Irish Republicans as ordinary ‘criminals’. This division of imprisonment created a situation whereby there was little appetite to advocate for the rights of prisoners held in Northern Ireland following the Troubles, even amongst former political prisoners who were now released from penal institutions.

The conference opened with a plenary, including presentations from conference organizer Phil Scraton (Queen’s University Belfast), Shadd Maruna (Queen’s University Belfast), Agnieszka Martynowicz (Irish Penal Reform Trust), and Robin Wilson (Refugee Action Group) that examined the state of incarceration in Ireland. The plenary concluded with the launch of ActionPrisons, the first abolitionist prison group founded in the North and South of Ireland. Following this, parallel sessions on incarcerated women and abolitionist movements respectively were held, featuring presentations by Jennifer Kilty (University of Ottawa) and Leah Devellis (Carleton University), Carole Eady (Center for Community Alternatives), Alejandro Forero Cuellar (Universitat de Barcelona), Rebecca Roberts (Centre for Crime and Justice Studies), and Isaac Ontiveros and Rachel Herzing (Critical Resistance).

In the afternoon, another plenary was held featuring a roundtable where international delegates including Mary Corcoran (Keele University), Pat Magill (Napier Pilot City Trust), Hal Pepinsky (Indiana University) and others discussed their views of what is to be abolished, strategies that can be used towards such ends, and alternatives that have been put into place to address conflicts appropriated by the state and its appendages. The proceedings for Day 1 concluded with presentations from Angela Harvey from the Inside-Out Prison Exchange, a program founded in the United

States where prisoners and students take university-level courses together inside prisons, and the work of the Educational Shakespeare Company (ESC) by Tom Magill, a former prisoner. The evening featured the second public screening of the outstanding adaptation of *Macbeth* in a contemporary prison produced by the ESC. It was filmed entirely in Maghaberry High Security Prison in Northern Ireland with long-term prisoners who also built the sets for the production. This screening was followed by a documentary on the making of the film, as well as a Q&A session with the Director, Tom Magill and Sam Maclean, now released after nearly 30 years inside, who played a central character in the film.

Continuing the discussion on inside-out collaborations, Day 2 of ICOPA 13 began with a presentation on the history of the *JPP*, followed by presentations of works authored or co-authored by prisoners and ex-prisoners. Four of the articles presentation during this plenary are include in the first dialogue of this issue. This collection begins with articles by Chas Ransome and Mujahid Farid, both prisoners held in New York State, who describe resistance to closing prisons in the jurisdiction amongst those concerned with the impacts of the job losses that such a change in penal policy trajectory would engender. While Ransome places the emphasis of his analysis on the commodification of prisoners, Farid builds on the works of prison activists and scholars such as Angela Davis (2003; see also Davis and Mendieta, 2005) with a discussion on the relationship between imprisonment and slavery in the United States. The dialogue also includes a contribution from Joel Medina and Beth Caldwell, who provide an account of the trauma experienced by Joel during his 12 years of imprisonment in California. This account is followed by a discussion on the need for trauma healing and the abolition of prisons as institutions that perpetuate, rather than prevent, violence. The special section also includes an article by Charles Huckelbury and Susan Nagelsen on the barriers to abolition in the United States, where the fear of 'crime' and terrorism remains pervasive.

Following the *JPP* plenary, parallel sessions on human rights within prisons and the prospects for abolition were held featuring presentations from Anastasia Karamalidou (Middlesex University), Catherine Ali (University of the West Indies), Ioanna Drosou (Greek Initiative for Prisoners' Rights), Azrini Wahidin (Queen's University Belfast), Shanta Balgobind Sing (Unviersity of Kwa Zulu Natal and Michael Coyle (University of California – Chico). Ireland became the focus of discussion

in the afternoon with a panel on criminalization and prisons featuring presentations by Ruth Jamieson (Queen's University Belfast), Bill Rolston (University of Ulster) and Mike Ritchie (Coiste Na nLarchimi Community Relations Council). The proceedings were followed by a community visit in Belfast where conference delegates participated on a tour of Loyalist and Republican neighbourhoods divided by a two-storey 'peace' wall led by former political prisoners. The day ended with a viewing of H3. An award winning film made in 2001 and shot in the H Blocks, H3 traces the context, circumstances and consequences of the policy of criminalization of political prisoners, the refusal of the Thatcher Government to negotiate and the 1981 Hunger Strikes. The viewing was followed by a Q&A with Hunger Striker Pat Sheehan held over dinner at An Cultúrlann culture and arts centre.

Day 3 of ICOPA 13 began with a plenary on the work of the Australia Prison Project with presentations by Chris Cunneen, Eileen Baldry and Melanie Schwartz (University of New South Wales). Presentations in the second session included Feargal Mac Ionnrachtaigh's (Forbairt Feirste) account on the role of language among Irish Republican political prisoners during the Troubles, as well as a presentation by Christian de Vito from Italy on penal abolitionism and prisoner movements in Western Europe during the 1960s and 1970s. Mary Corcoran (Keele University) also presented a paper on the increasing use of philanthropic discourses used by the NGO and voluntary sectors to promote the extension of carceral controls beyond prisons. In the afternoon session, conference organizer Phil Scraton and Jehanne Hulsman (Hulsman Foundation) each gave presentations honouring the life of longstanding ICOPA participant and social justice advocate Louk Hulsman.¹

As the conference wound down, the discussion turned towards the future of ICOPA. After a few hours of dialogue, it was decided that the conference-movement would work towards the launch of a website – www.actionicopa.org – to create a space for those engaged in abolitionist work to exchange information, share resources, and find information on past and upcoming ICOPA conferences. This website is now up and running. It was also resolved that the next conference would be held in Trinidad and Tobago. A call for contributions for these meetings can be found at the back of this issue.

While ICOPA was unfolding in Belfast, downtown Toronto was on lockdown for the meeting of the G20. By the end of the summit, the

heavy-handed practices of the massive multi-agency Integrated Security Unit mobilized for the event resulted in the Toronto G20 becoming the site of the largest mass arrests in peacetime Canadian history. The second dialogue section in this issue features contributions from people who were detained during this event, in response to our Call for Papers on the theme of ‘Summit Detention’.

It is important to acknowledge the plurality of sites and practices that make up the contemporary carceral, and to make visible the connections between them. The Toronto G20 involved short-term detention for the purpose of suppressing dissent. Instances of intimidation, police brutality, and the use of ‘kettling’ tactics² were commonplace. The civil liberties of protesters and bystanders alike were breached in the name of ‘security’ by police officers working on behalf of the political and financial elites cloistered in the fenced-off downtown convention centre. A combination of secrecy and misinformation led to widespread confusion about the scope of expanded police powers of search and seizure under a hastily-passed amendment to the WWII-era *Public Works Protection Act*. These practices led to two immediate results. First, the impromptu detention centre created in anticipation of the G20 arrests filled up with detainees, most of whom were arrested for ‘breach of the peace’. Second, and as a result, the G20 protests themselves shifted thematic focus: what began as a series of demonstrations targeting the devastating effects of neoliberal globalization and governance by and for transnational financial elites (among other issues) transformed into protests against arbitrary arrests and detentions and the violent dispersal of demonstrators by police (see NUPGE / CCLA, 2011). The streets outside the Eastern Avenue Detention Centre and the Toronto Police Service Headquarters became key sites of protest.

Summit detention, as we are calling it, involves the use of arrest and incarceration – often but not always short-term – as a means of suppressing and criminalizing dissent. The practices of detention associated with the public order policing of the G20 were not new. The history of the institution of policing is the history of the preservation of the status quo, and this has traditionally involved strike breaking, the use of violence against demonstrators, and the arrest and detention of those members of the so-called dangerous classes who take their grievances to the streets. Going into the Toronto event, demonstrators were aware that British police had used kettling, intimidation and mass arrests during the protests against the 2009

meeting of the G20 in London. Despite these historical patterns, the events that unfolded in Toronto in June 2010 caught many of us by surprise for several reasons, not least of which being the sheer scale of the arrests and the broader securitization of the event.

An unprecedented 1,105 people were arrested over the course of the Toronto G20, including a number of pre-summit arrests and post-hoc round-ups. Many were arrested while demonstrating peacefully. Others were plucked out of police kettles. Still others were swept up in pre-emptive warrantless raids on demonstrator hostels and organizing spaces. Detainees were processed, strip-searched and held in crowded mesh cages. The vast majority of these people would be released without charge and most of those who were charged had their charges dropped over the next few months. The official RCMP After Action Report (AAR) for the combined G8-G20 summits (held days apart) describes them as “the largest domestic security operations in Canadian history, matching or surpassing all previous Summits and major events in scope, scale and complexity” (RCMP, 2011, p. 15). The total security budget for the summits was in excess of \$1 billion, and over 20,000 security personnel were involved (Marin, 2010).

The RCMP report interprets the events as a major success, with success being measured by the “safe and secure movement of International Protected Persons (IPPs), lack of security incidents involving IPPs and lack of serious injury or death to general public and IPPs” (RCMP, 2011, p. 15). The Ombudsman of Ontario and Canadian Civil Liberties Association had different interpretations, noting respectively that the mass arrests were “unprecedented and, for many, alien to the traditional Canadian persona” (Marin, 2010, p. 26) and that the police “disregarded the constitutional rights of thousands” (NUPGE / CCLA, 2011, p. 13).

It is worth taking a moment to explain how the G20 ISU managed to find room to imprison 1,105 people over the course of a weekend in Toronto. The arrangements made for summit detention reflect the power of Canadian government agencies to remake available spaces in the mold of the prison as the need arises. Rather than using existing Toronto and Ontario jails and detention facilities, the G20 ISU created the temporary Eastern Avenue Detention Centre by retrofitting the former Toronto Film Studios building with steel and plywood cages, booking facilities and other carceral paraphernalia. The irony of choosing a film studio as the setting for a spectacle of security theatre seemed lost on the ISU. For us, the ease with

which urban space can be re-tasked for the purpose of mass detention – a form of short-term political imprisonment – is an alarming illustration of the adaptability of the carceral. While carceral expansion is primarily about the creation of enduring edifices (see Piché, 2011), it is also achieved through the reconfiguration of convenient spaces in order to effect the deprivation of liberty (see Piché and Larsen, 2010). The normalization of this practice is anticipated in the Toronto Police Service’s After Action Report, which includes the following recommendation:

That the TPS research and develop facility and operational plans for large temporary detention centres for similar events. The plans should include improved facility location and design, high capacity intake and release systems, cross-training of court officers and police officers, a major event prisoner transport strategy, the use of a single prisoner management computer program, the continued use of on-site medical practitioners and duty counsel and enhanced prisoner property management systems (Toronto Police Service 2011, p. 62).

The contributions to this issue’s dialogue on Summit Detention provide insights into the practices and conditions that characterized the Eastern Avenue Detention Centre. In “Reflecting on Summit Detention: Connecting Carceral Spaces”, Swathi Sekhar describes her experience of 22 hours in the Eastern Avenue Detention Centre. Sekhar was arrested while attending a prisoner solidarity demonstration as a legal observer. In her article, she draws connections between her own detention during the extraordinary circumstances of the G20 and the everyday experiences of prisoners and immigration detainees, both in Canada and internationally. This connection also forms a central theme in “Political Protest, Mass Arrest and Mass Detention: Fundamental Freedoms and (Un)common Criminals”, by Debra Parkes and Meaghan Daniel. Their article is structured around Meaghan’s narrative account of her detention during the G20, and it combines a review of the legal basis for the criminalization of dissent in Canada with reflections on the implications of the oft-heard complaint that G20 detainees were treated “like common criminals”.

We faced a number of challenges assembling this dialogue. First and foremost, many of those who wrote us to share their experiences and analysis were effectively silenced by restrictive bail conditions or pending court cases

related to the G20. While most of these cases were eventually dropped, they created a noticeable chilling effect on a group of people who were otherwise eager to tell their stories. Second, many were wary of writing for the *JPP* because they were uncomfortable about drawing parallels between their admittedly frightening, degrading, and abusive experiences of short-term summit detention and the long-term incarceration experienced by most *JPP* contributors. The contributors to this dialogue recognize and acknowledge the important distinctions between these lived realities. They also draw our attention to important similarities between the degradation and violence of summit detention and the everyday features of imprisonment in Canada.

In June 2010, 1,105 people were packed like sardines into a temporary outpost of the prison industrial complex in Toronto. This was an historic and troubling event and we are glad to see it reflected in the pages of the *JPP*. Continuing with the theme of state repression and resistance, the Prisoners' Struggles section features short pieces UK Anarchist Black Cross groups in Brighton and Bristol, as well as Ellis Nash Sr., in the pursuit of justice inside and outside prison walls.

MOVING FORWARD AND AN INVITATION

The production of *JPP* issues for 2012 is already well underway. Two members of our Editorial Board, Stephen Richards and Mike Lenza, have been busy editing Volume 21(1), a special issue on Convict Criminology. This collection, which celebrates the fifteenth anniversary of the founding of the Convict Criminology group, includes articles on a range of topics from both new and long-standing contributors to this small, but growing, movement within the study of imprisonment.

At this time, we are working with a number of Canadian contributors and hope to publish some of their submissions detailing the changes that are occurring in some of Canada's prisons in Volume 21(2). This general issue will also feature a *Dialogue* section with contributions written by incarcerated participants of the Fall 2010 Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program (see www.insideoutcenter.org) course at the Bristol County 'House of Corrections' taught by Viviane Saleh-Hanna of the University of Massachusetts in Dartmouth. These pieces, which focus on the theme of racism, were supplemented by statistics and other facts gathered by 15 undergraduate students who also participated in this course behind prison walls.

Also on the horizon is a *Dialogue* section being compiled by Hollis Johnson and Jane Miller-Ashton of Kwantlen Polytechnic University, based on contributions from and in collaboration with participants of an Inside-Out course in British Columbia, Canada at Matsqui Institution, a federal penitentiary. This inaugural course brought together inside (prisoner) and outside (student) learners to explore through literature the theme of ‘us and them – the deconstruction of the other’.

In 2013, we will celebrate the twenty-fifth anniversary of the *JPP*. With this important milestone quickly approaching it is important to take stock of the shifts and continuities that have characterized the carceral over this time, as well as the role prison writing has played in documenting the lived realities and the socio-politics of imprisonment. It is also an opportunity for the *JPP* to return to its roots. As Davidson (1988) and Gaucher (2002) note, and as we have argued elsewhere (see Piché and Larsen, 2010), the *JPP* emerged as a vehicle for current and former prisoners to offer a glimpse into the material reality of incarceration from individuals directly impacted by the deprivation of liberty. The mission of the journal emerged out of a recognition that the voices of prisoners were often marginalized in prison scholarship and activism. In fact, the first volume of the *JPP* featured papers presented at ICOPA 3 in Montreal and represented an effort to address the under-representation of the incarcerated at previous ICOPA meetings. It is this spirit that we wish to renew our commitment and again invite prisoners from across the world to share their experiences of incarceration and analyses of the politics of punishment, as well as the importance of writing as resistance, by submitting articles for review for our twenty-fifth anniversary collection. These submissions can be forwarded to our new mailing address:

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ENDNOTES

- ¹ For more on the life of Louk Hulsman visit www.loukhulsman.org; also see Scraton, Phil (2010) “Beyond the ‘Moment of Abolition’: Louk Hulsman 1923-2009”, *Journal of Prisoners on Prisons*, 18(1&2): 1-9.
- ² Kettling (as in, to put something in a confined space and apply heat and pressure) involves the practice of surrounding protesters by a tightening ring of police officers (often in riot gear). Protesters are prevented from leaving. Kettles can last for hours, during which time the police are able to make targeted arrests, pulling individuals out of the larger captive group. In the wake of the controversy associated with the use of kettling during the G20, the Toronto Police Service has promised not to use the tactic again.

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