

ACLU alleges massive human rights violations at Mississippi private prison

By Tom Hall
3 June 2013

A lawsuit filed Thursday by the American Civil Liberties Union and the Southern Poverty Law Center accuses the for-profit East Mississippi Correctional Facility of major human rights violations. The prison, operated by Management and Training Corporation with health care provided by Health Assurance, LLC, is designed to house prisoners with major psychiatric disabilities.

The lawsuit describes appalling conditions: no working toilets, no working lights, prisoners underfed, prisoners pushed to suicide or setting fires in order to receive medical attention. Inmates sustained gruesome injuries: one was rendered legally blind by the refusal of the facility to provide for his glaucoma medication; another developed gangrene and had his finger amputated after being stabbed.

The brief further alleges that the Mississippi Department of Corrections has known about the conditions for years but has failed to do anything about them.

Many prisoners are kept in solitary confinement in pitch-black, filthy cells. With no working toilets, prisoners are forced to defecate into Styrofoam trays and plastic bags and toss them through the slots in their doors. The brief explains that one of the solitary confinement areas is known by prisoners as “the Dead Man’s Zone” or “the Dead Area,” “... because the prisoners are virtually unsupervised and their basic needs are ignored.”

Rats are described as so commonplace that they have become an underground commodity, as they are put on leashes and sold as pets to the most seriously mentally ill inmates. Some prisoners engage in grisly self-mutilation, “including electrocution, swallowing shards of glass and razors, and tearing into their flesh with sharp objects.” Minors are sometimes sent to the

prison, where they are thrown into solitary confinement, sexually assaulted, or worse.

The prison is severely understaffed, and Management and Training Corporation throws guards into their work after a perfunctory three-week training course. Undermanned and poorly trained, they rely primarily on violence to control the prison’s population.

The conditions at East Mississippi Correctional Facility, while shocking, are hardly isolated—the result of the brutalization of American society over the past quarter century. The relative decline of American capitalism over the entire preceding period has led to an explosion of violence from the ruling elite directed against the world working class, manifested abroad in unending criminal wars and at home in the erosion of democratic rights.

The US prison population has increased by 400 percent in just over 30 years. From a total prison population of 474,368 in 1980, the United States has now become the world’s leading jailer, with 2,266,800 inmates as of 2011. Entire sections of the population, in particular minorities and immigrants, are being persecuted, thrown in jail, and scapegoated as the cause of American society’s problems in order to divide the working class.

The growth of for-profit prisons is a particularly sinister manifestation of this trend. The private prison business, non-existent until the early 1980s, has increased its number of prisoners by around 1600 percent in the past twenty years, according to the ACLU.

In particular, about half of all immigrants held by the federal government are detained in for-profit prisons.

Driven by the anarchy of the market to keep costs as low as possible while maximizing income, for-profit prisons, which account for around \$3 billion in annual

revenue, seek to cram as many inmates into as shoddy conditions as is feasible. As the industry continues to expand, such social crimes as that witnessed at East Mississippi Correctional Facility will surely only increase in number and intensity.

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