

# "Inside and Outside Prisons: Liberation Is A Struggle"

July 2010

Founded in 1993 and led by Unión del Barrio, the Chicano Mexicano Prison Project (CMPP) has been the longest lasting and most consistent organization doing work around the question of the mass incarceration of Mexicano-Indigenous peoples by the U.S. colonialist institution known as the "Criminal Justice System". It is an institution whose main purpose is to control and oppress the Mexicano and other colonized nations, within and outside its "borders".

The CMPP's main goal has been to raise the consciousness of Raza "in and out of prison" and expose to the world that the prison system not only serves to oppress Mexicanos and other working/poor and colonized people, but that it also makes billions of dollars out of the suffering and brutality faced by our people in these concentration camps. Hence our goal is to put an end to the social-economic system known as "capitalism-colonialism", which gave birth to and maintains the concentration camps, and profits from the incarceration hundreds of thousands of our people.

## TEAR THE WALLS OF OPPRESSION AND COLONIZATION

The CMPP understands that to reach this goal, necessitates the raising of the political consciousness and unification of our people into an organization with the capacity to win our liberation. For almost twenty years, the CMPP has worked tirelessly to realization of this goal. The CMPP has organized literally hundreds of events and actions. From yearly conferences to protests and demonstrations, to the dissemination of literature that promotes education and unity among Raza doing time in the concentrations (aka prisons) of the United States, the CMPP fought to build a movement that will tear down the walls of oppression and colonization.

It was part of this ongoing work that on June 19, 2010, the CMPP organized its annual conference/retreat on Raza Prisoners and Colonialism. Held under the theme of "Inside and Outside Prisons: Liberation Is A Struggle", the conference was took place at the Centro Cultural de La Raza in San Diego, Califaztlán.

Close to one hundred activists and community people, young and old, women and men, attended the conference. Many were inspired by the banners calling for Raza liberation and symbols of our Mexicano/Indigenous culture that were hanged on the walls of the Centro Cultural de La Raza. Those attending also came contact with several organizations that had set-up tables with newsletters, books, pamphlets, political buttons and posters, demanding Raza liberation and an end to the racist and anti-poor/working class prison system.

The conference was endorsed by the Raza Rights

Coalition (RRC-San Diego), Raza Press and Media Association (RPMA), MEChA SD City College, Association of Raza Educators (ARE), African People's Socialist Party (APSP), Committee On Raza Rights (Oxnard, CA), Mexicanos Unidos En Defensa del Pueblo (MUDP), IDEAS (SD City College), Brown Berets de Aztlán, Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional (FMLN-Los Angeles), Frente Popular Revolucionario (Tijuana), La Raza Unida Party, and SDSU MEChA. The conference endorsement of so many organizations is testament to the CMPP's work to inform our community and unite activists around the struggle to end the institutions that uphold colonialism and capitalist exploitation of the masses of our community.

In the announcements used to publicize and outreach for the conference, the CMPP wrote: "Inside and outside prisons, Raza are catching hell from white-settler vigilantes, the various police agencies, and the so-called criminal justice system. And, as the current economic crisis of the racist U.S. imperialist system continues, the vicious attacks against the Mexican-Indigenous community will only get worst. Through the worst type of brutality, fascist-racist laws, irrelevant 'colonial' education, and the locking up of our youth -we see how schools, police, courts, and prisons are being utilized to destroy our capacity to unite and defend ourselves!"

"To find solutions to this current situation will be central to the discussions and presentations that will take place at the Chicano Mexicano Prison Project (CMPP) Conference On Raza Prisoners And Colonialism. The aim of the conference will be to enable those who believe in the liberation of Raza and other oppressed people, to come together to 'Learn, Share and Prepare' ourselves to more effectively struggle against the beast known as capitalism-imperialism."

## THE CONFERENCE CONSISTED OF SPEAKERS, DISCUSSIONS, SOLUTIONS, AND PINTO ART SHOW

The conference itself was divided into four sections: (a). Keynote speakers: (b) Panel discussions; (c) Pinto art show (coordinated by Cathy Espitia); and (d) Fund-raiser social and dinner (coordinated by Isabel Peña).

The conference was facilitated by Monica Bernal and Cristal Rodriguez, and began with Indigenous Ceremony by Danza Azteca Calpulli Mexihca anda brief introduction by Ernesto Bustillos, one of the founders of the CMPP. The keynote presentations were given by Benjamin Olguin (Professor University of Texas, San Antonio) and Diop Olugbala (African People's Socialist Party, Philadelphia). A special recognition was given to Irene Mena, who has committed 40 years of her life to the struggle for the liberation of La Raza and



Benjamin Olguin



Cathy Espitia and Teresa Zaragoza



Pablo Aceves



Diop Olugbala





Dylan Rodriguez



Enrique Ochoa



Dennis Childs



Francisco Romero

for more than five years has been a member of the CMPP. Also, Enrique Ochoa/Frente Popular Revolucionario (Tijuana), delivered a message of solidarity connecting the struggle around prisoners on both sides of the U.S. imposed division ("border") of our nation (Mexico).

The conference panels and discussions focused on three key areas of importance to the question of Raza Prisoners and Colonialism:

(1) The Prison Industrial Complex: The role of capitalism, colonialism, and the mass incarceration of Raza. This panel exposed the profits that the capitalist-colonialists make out of Mexican, African, and other oppressed and poor communities locked up throughout the United States (Occupied America) of Raza. Speaking at this panel were Dylan Rodriguez (Professor, Prison Rights Activist, UC Riverside, CA) and Pablo Aceves (a leading member of Unión del Barrio)

(2) Women and Youth and Colonial Incarceration: This panel discussed why so many Mexicano/as-Raza are being sent to prison, how this impacts our community, and what needs to be done to end this

**"Sending our youth and women to concentration camps (prisons) -is nothing but a genocidal campaign directed at Mexicanos and other Indigenous Peoples"**

situation. It exposed how the sending of our youth and women to concentration camps -is nothing but a genocidal campaign directed at Mexicanos and other indigenous peoples. Speaking on this panel were Francisco Romero (Teacher, Committee On Raza Rights, Oxnard, CA), Cathy Espitia (coordinator of the CMPP), Estela Ayala (La Raza Unida Party, San Fernando, CA), and Teresa Zaragoza (Danza Mexica Cuauhtémoc, Norwalk/Los Angeles).

(3) Planting The Seeds Of Unity: Violence Among Colonized People In Prisons And The Streets. The purpose of this workshop was to bring to light what is behind all the racial violence in prisons and how it affects all of us, whether in the streets or prisons. Speaking on this panel were Dennis Childs (Professor, African American Studies/Literature-UCSD, Prison Rights Activist), Diop Olugbala (Leading Member of African People's Socialist Party, Philadelphia, PA.), and Cesar Gonzalez

(Brown Berets de Aztlán, San Diego). Out of this panel, a resolution for Raza and Africans to work in unity was developed. It read, "We must organize a campaign to build unity amongst Africans and Mexicans

and other colonized peoples, both inside and outside of prisons, to expose the divide and conquer strategy implemented by the state, and to ultimately form a

united front against our real oppressors".

## **A COMMITMENT TO END RACIST-BRUTAL TREATMENT OF RAZA PRISONERS**

The conference participants also reaffirmed a commitment to work on resolutions formulated at last year's conference. These were:

1. End to all forms of prison torture, including the SHU (security housing units).
2. End to inhumane, illegal, and oppressive laws such as the 3 Strikes Law, Prop. 21 (allows children to be tried as adults), and anti-immigrant ordinances (makes it illegal to rent a home, park cars on streets, etc.)
3. End to capital punishment. It is not only inhumane and cruel, but on too many occasions, innocent people are executed for crimes they did not commit.
4. The review of all cases/convictions by "independent commissions" of human/civil rights organizations to determine if those convicted received a fair trial. Our communities know that most Raza in prison are locked up because of racist juries/judges or lack of funds to pay for effective legal defense.

5. End to mass incarceration as being implemented by the ICE (Immigration Customs and Enforcement) raids. Hundreds of children, women and men, are rounded up everyday by an occupation paramilitary force and sent to prison for living in a land that belongs to them.

6. An end to gang injunctions and all forms of criminalization of youth. Branded as "gang members", our young people are being locked-up and criminalized by the thousands.

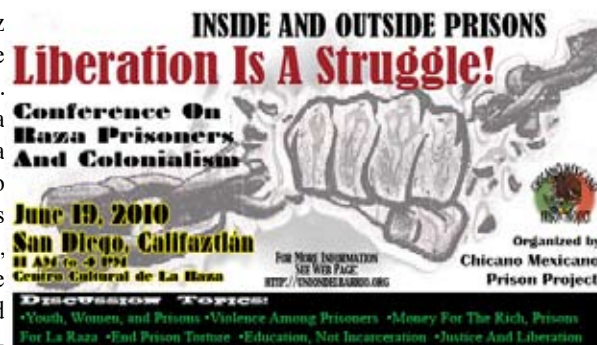
7. The immediate firing of all racist and sadistic prison personnel (wardens, assistants, guards, etc.). We must end the brutal and racist treatment that Raza and other non-European prisoners face on a daily basis.

8. Freedom of religion and spiritual expression in all prisons. Just as Christianity is allowed in prisons, so too should the practice of Indigenous religions be permitted.

9. Establishment of rehabilitation programs to include vocational, primary/secondary, and college education.

10. Proper medical care for all prisoners. Prisoners with psychological problems should be sent to hospitals, not prison.

11. The immediate implementation of Raza/Chicano/Mexican Studies and Multicultural programs, associations, and/or study groups. Education builds self-esteem, and enables prisoners to truly understand the society in





# WE MUST PUT AN END TO THE TERRORISTIC U.S. COLONIAL CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM



Cristal Rodriguez and Monica Bernal



Conference on Raza Prisoners and Colonialism June 20, 2010, Centro Cultural de La Raza, San Diego, Califazt-

which they exist.

12. The formation of "prison administration committees" composed of family members of prisoners, community organizations, human rights/legal workers, and prisoners, to oversee prison policies and guarantee the respect for the human rights of prisoners.

## REAL CRIMINALS ARE THE RICH CAPITALIST AND WARMONGERS

Since its establishment the CMPP has upheld the position that European/White settlers and their neo-colonial collaborators (vendidos of all types and colors) have no legal or moral right to arrest and imprison Mexicanos and other indigenous people. In fact, we argue that it is the racist white settlers (such as the ones in Arizona today), along with the capitalist system which they uphold, who should be arrested and locked up for their on-going crimes against humanity, committed here within the belly beast and around the world (wars against the people of Iraq, Afghanistan, etc).

The conference emphasized that it is time for our

movement to seriously struggle and come to grips with the reality that prisons not only sustain capitalism through profits made by the imprisonment of our people, but they are also tools of social control and part of a strategy to keep Mexicanos-Raza and Africans warring against each other, instead of the white power institutions known as capitalism and imperialism –the true enemy of our people.

To the CMPP, this year's conference was a success. We know of no other Raza national liberation event around the question prisons that one could find the quality of the speakers and panelists as those who presented at the conference. The number of people present, the organizational endorsements we received, and the constant applause of approval and support from those in attendance, was a clear indication that we had succeeded in organizing a conference that will contribute to the liberation of our people and put an end to terroristic U.S. colonial "criminal justice system".

The task before the CMPP and other activists present is to work as hard as we can to make real

the resolutions and demands agreed upon at the conference. The CMPP, through its work with Raza Press and Media Association and its newsletter, *Las Calles Y La Torcida*, we keep our members and allies informed on the work being done to bring to life these resolutions and demands. One of our immediate objectives will be to transcribe into print some of the presentations delivered at the conference, as well as edit the video recordings and post them on our Web Page.

As always, we welcome constructive criticism and suggestions from all honest forces active in the struggle for the liberation of Raza and all oppressed people. The CMPP understands that dialogue and criticism/self-criticism is one of the best methods of learning and moving our struggle forward.

Venceremos.

[Eidtor's Note: also helping in the organizing and success of the conference were compas Judy de Los Santos, Liz Ochoa, David Rodriguez, Tobias Hernandez, Jacqueline Figueroa -- and the staff of the Centro Cultural de La Raza.]



Ernesto Bustillos



Cesar Gonzalez



Estela Ayala



Irene Mena